

JULY 25¢

VOLUME 10
NUMBER 7

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ADVENTURES

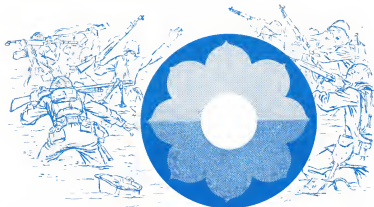
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QUEEN of the PANTHER WORLD
by BERKELEY LIVINGSTON

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NUMBER 7

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QUEEN OF THE PANTHER WORLD

(Novel) by Berkeley Livingston..... 8

Illustrated by Rod Ruth

The strength of Queen Lurie and her black panther hordes was not equal to the cunning of Loko and his lizard men—unless Lurie could capture the enchanted Groota bird...

MIRRORS OF THE QUEEN

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Lolo was a queen in her own way—queen of the mirrors in a burlesque show. But these were not ordinary mirrors, for they opened, like windows, into a strange, alien world...

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It seemed like an easy way to obtain money—all you had to do was sign your name to a contract and your body was sold, to be delivered after death. But there was a catch...

AIR RACE

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The Niles City Air Race meant a lot to Chock Benson, especially the \$5000 first prize. And the lack of an airplane didn't worry him, for Benson had a carpet—a flying one...

Front cover painting by Ramon Naylor, illustrating
a scene from "Queen of the Panther World."

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The Editor's Notebook

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT WITH THE EDITOR

YOU readers may be receiving this issue of FA a few days late. We apologize for this, and don't like it any more than you do, but unfortunately we are in the midst of a strike in the printing industry here in Chicago at this publication time, and as a result your favorite magazine has been caught in the middle of it. But don't worry about receiving future copies of FA and the best in science—fantasy fiction it represents—we'll get the magazine to you if we have to mimeograph it and send it by carrier pigeon! So bear with us.

NOW to get down to this month's stories. You've already admired the swell cover by Ramon Naylor, no doubt, so we won't have to tell you much about that. But the story around which the cover was painted is another matter. Old-timer, and top-notch, Berkeley Livingston has turned in a typical Livingston masterpiece in "Queen of the Panther World." You'll be a little surprised by this yarn for you'll find Berk has actually written himself in as one of the major characters in the story. You think that's bad?

Or maybe you're wondering if it was a wise thing for an author to do? Well you read the story first, and then decide. Then write us.

RICHARD H. SHAVER returns this month with a neat little fantasy, also about a queen. But the queen in Dick's story is quite a different gal than the one in our lead novel for this month. Dick writes about a "queen of the burlesque", a lady who didn't use veils so much for sensationalism, but mirrors. And that's where the story begins, with the peculiar set of mirrors used in a burlesque act. Where the story ends up would be unfair to tell you here, so you'll just have to swallow the teaser we've handed you and find out for yourself! Incidentally, Dick dropped in the other day and said that if possible he'd like to have us tell you that he's very glad the readers of FA have taken such an intense interest in the "Shaver Mystery Club", and that also, for any who missed the letter concerning the club's activities in the May issue, he'd be very glad to have them get in touch with him at 2414 Lawrence Ave., Chicago, and join. We think it's a good idea too, for any of you readers who want to find out more about the Shaver Mystery, and you'll certainly make a lot of pen-pals.

THIS month, in keeping with our policy of presenting new writers to you as often as we can, we're presenting a novelette by a new writer in the field, Wehh Marlowe. The story, entitled, "Contract For A Body", is a darn good fantasy every way you look at it. It concerns a man who needed money pretty badly, and found that the only way he could get it would be to sell his body. No, not his soul—his body. Where is the fantasy in that? Well we can assure you that you'll find plenty of it, not to mention the fact that Marlowe hit on a neat twist to an old theme. We think the lad has plenty on the ball, but will leave that up to you when you write us about the story.

WARREN KASTEL finishes up the issue this month with a swell little fantasy, entitled, "Air Race." This is the story of a flyer who entered an air race without an airplane. Impossible, you say? Well not quite. It seems that this flyer had something that was slightly better than an airplane—a flying carpet. No, don't sit back so smug now and say you know the end of the story. Sure he has to win the race, you say. But we think you'll be more than a little surprised at the ending to the story. WJH

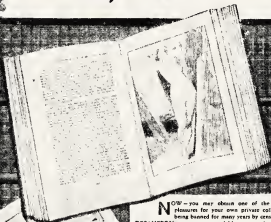


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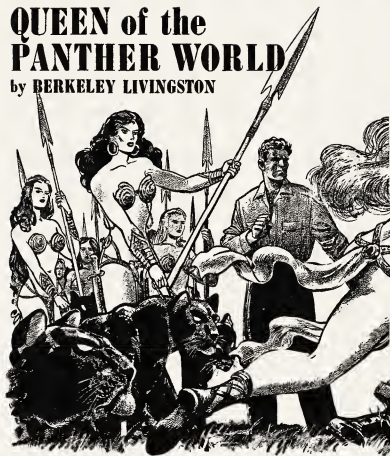
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QUEEN of the PANTHER WORLD

by BERKELEY LIVINGSTON



It was a strange world, this world of Amazons and panthers — where all men bowed their heads in fear of the great Queen Luria . . .



The Amazon moved quicker than I had expected, and suddenly my head rocked from a terrific blow. . .

I DO NOT say that adventure cannot begin anywhere. Of course it can! And usually does. But let us speak of *specific* places. I once met a Metropolitan baritone singing in a cheap honky-tonk on west Madison Street. He said it was the only place he knew of

where he could act as he wished, drink what he wanted and talk to the people he wanted. And fight with whom he pleased. Turned out he had once planned on being a fighter until some rich woman heard him sing. . . .

I was once a skip-tracer for a collec-

tion outfit and followed a man all the way to Mexico City; he owed a certain merchant fifty thousand dollars and had the money. And while I was trying to locate this skip the police of Mexico City thought I was an international agent and dogged my steps until

one night they thought they had something on me and clapped me in the calaboose and held me incommunicado for twenty-four hours before I could get in touch with the consulate. . . .

But let me be even more specific.

It began on a wondrous spring day.

Summer was not quite ready to thrust its heat against us, the air was warm and fragrant with growing things, I had a couple of hucks in my kick and I had just fallen out of love. I believe I said it was a wonderful day . . . ? Well, I'd called Henry Sharpe the night before and we had made plans to go to Brookfield Zoo where the animals can come up close and sneer at the humans.

"A weekday's best," Sharpe said as I slid into the seat beside him. "Sunday brings out the week-end nature lover and his camera. Besides, the animals aren't quite so bored on a week-day. Maybe. . . ."

"Maybe what?" I asked. I wasn't looking at him but was watching him get out into the traffic of La Salle street.

"Nothing," he said shortly. He was looking straight ahead but there was an odd crinkle to his forehead as though he were thinking of something which bothered him.

* * *

We parked and began the long walk to the animal houses. As Hank had predicted there weren't many people about. I saw a group of school children herded by their teacher moving determinedly toward the aviary. But our paths did not converge. Sharpe is the fastest walking little man I've ever known. I'm not on the big side myself and it's always been a problem keeping up with him unless I go at a half-trot. After some few hundred yards, I was getting a bit winded.

"Hey! Take it easy. We got all day," I said, panting heavily.

"Sorry, Berk," he said. "But it's such a relief getting away from those damn drawings. . . . Besides, I'm anxious to see something."

"So am I," I said. "But at the rate we're moving I'll need a chair to see them in. I'm that pooped."

We slowed after a while to a more sedate run. By that time I'd given up the struggle and was dragging my tail ten feet behind Sharpe. I had been so husy just keeping pace with him I hadn't even noticed where he had made his goal. I leaned my weight over the iron rail and looked across the moat to where the animals lolled in the sun. The scene was a rocky bit of jungle land. There were painted limitations of rocks, hushes, trees, and a small grotto led to the inside cages. There were some four of them there, great black things, panthers all; mama, papa and a couple of baby panthers which didn't look any different than their parents. At least their teeth were no smaller when they yawned.

ONE OF them rose and strolled to the edge of the moat and fell to his haunches and stared at us out of his great yellow eyes. There's something about the big cats, lions, tigers, panthers, the whole feline trihe, down to the smallest tabby, that reaches right down and pulls at the atavistic remembrances of man. I felt the hair rise at the nape and knew my breath was catching as the beast looked at the two of us. It was as though I could reach through the bone and fur to that tiny brain and pluck out what lay there. It was as if he was saying, five minutes out there and we'd see who'd be boss.

"That's right, baby," I said aloud. "But you're in there and I'm out here. . . ."

"Huh?" Hank whirled to me.

I grinned and told him what I had been thinking of. But the grin was wiped from my lips at what I saw in his eyes. They were just wild in excitement.

"So you heard it too," he said.

"Heard what?" I asked.

"What the panther said."

"Now wait a minute. I didn't bear anything! A picture formed in my mind of what the beast might be thinking if he could think."

He turned back then and looked at the beast. I saw that his fingers were white against the rail. I saw too that the knuckles were bloodless. Something was wrong. I puzzled over it then turned my attention to another of the tribe. This one I hadn't seen before. He was coming out of the semi-darkness of the grotto into the sunlight. I gasped at the size of him. He was the biggest panther I'd ever seen, a full seven feet from head to tail-tip. He stalked out into the sunlight and stood poised, the only movement a sinuous twitch of the black tail. I don't know how the beast at the lip of the moat heard or knew of the other's presence, but before our amazed eyes, it turned and leaped toward the other with a blood-chilling scream of anger.

I heard Hank's sibilant intake of breath, heard the muted, "Aah!" that came from his lips. But my whole attention was taken by the drama before us.

The giant panther waited the coming of the smaller one with the utmost equanimity. It didn't do any more than face the other. Not even its tail twitched. Yet when the smaller one was but a few paces away; in fact the other had already leaped in a wild lunge, then the big beast moved. But when it moved it was a greased streak of black lightning. I have never seen anything move so fast. One second it was facing its adversary, the next it had reared and slashed at the bundle of charged dynamite which had flung itself at him. There was but a single blow. There must have been terrific power in that paw to do what it did. For the smaller beast was flung a good five yards through the air. It landed heavily on

its back, rolled over and began to drag itself toward the other. I saw then that its back had been broken by the blow. I let a whistle escape my lips.

There was more to come. As though the smaller one's leap had been a signal all the others converged on the single monstrous thing in the center of the arena. Only this time the immense beast did not wait for the attack. It leaped like a bolt straight for the largest of its enemies. I didn't know that the big cats felt or knew fear. At least not till then. But as the huge thing left its feet, the smaller one turned and leaped screaming for the protection of the grotto. And behind it came the others. I turned quickly to the remaining one. It stood facing the grotto mouth after it landed. There was a snarl on its mouth and the huge canines turned me cold inside.

I COULDN'T take my eyes from the monster. It moved so slowly, so pre-meditatively. I watched it move toward the maimed panther which had stopped its futile movement and lay stretched full length on the ground. The big one approached the other at an angle. When it was only a few feet away it swerved and came in from the rear. The beast on the ground must have had an intuitive idea why because it tried to turn to face the enemy. Before it could complete the turn the big one was on him. It was over quickly. A single, bone-crunching snap of the huge jaws and life departed for the broken-backed panther. It was then the keepers appeared.

A shuddering sigh was wrenched from Hank's lips as the keepers busied themselves with fire hoses, used, I supposed for just such an emergency. The powerful streams of water hit the panther from three sides and drove him snarling backward to the grotto. When it finally disappeared into it a gate was

lowered. I wanted to stay and see what happened then. But Hank had other ideas.

"No. I've seen enough," he said. "Besides, I've got something to tell you."

We didn't go far, only to the place where the elephants stood, great brown splotches against the deeper brown of their surroundings. Hank made sure we were removed from the rest of the crowd before he began to talk.

"Berk, do you think I'm goofy?" he asked.

"The goofiest guy I know," I said with a laugh. "I've always said that . . ."

He should have smiled. He should have done anything but what he did, grab my wrist and pull me closer to him.

"Wait!" he said sharply. "I'm not kidding. Let me start from the beginning because that way I'll get things in order."

"In the first place you know the kind of guy I am about animals. Always traipsing off somewhere, to the Forest Preserve, or the dunes or some zop or other. Just because I like to see the animals, the big ones and the little ones. I've always been interested in them, as if there was a bond between us. You've often mentioned that I'm the only guy you know who can walk up to a cat, for instance and immediately it'll start purring. Or to a dog, no matter how big, and it'll eat out of my hand. Well, something strange happened last week. Brookfield opened then for the summer. Of course I was one of the first to get here.

"Well, through the years I've become pretty well-known out here and they let me have my run of the place. So the first thing happens, Joe Edson, the head keeper grabs me and drags me up to the big cat house. Takes me up to the panther cage and says:

"Look, Hank."

"Look at what?" I asked.

"The size of that cat."

"Berk, it was the biggest cat I've ever seen. Now get this. Panthers are the smallest of the big cats. They're really small lions. But this baby, the same one we just saw was bigger than even the biggest lion. But it was a panther. It was a panther but for one thing, its canines. They were those of a tiger. Bigger, longer, Berk, than any tiger's."

I was following him pretty good. So far he hadn't said anything to warrant the state of excitement he was in. But I hadn't heard everything.

He went on:

"Ed got a call from one of the keepers just then and I was left alone. The cat was in a far corner. Soon as Ed left the cat got up and moved close to the bars and faced me. He looked at me with those devil's eyes of his and his lips parted in a grin. Damn! It was almost human, that grin. I wondered where they got such a magnificent animal. . . . Berk! I swear to God, this is what happened. The cat said, 'You wouldn't believe it if it were told to you.'"

I KNOW I was smiling when he said what he did. And I know the smile was still on my face as I turned and looked him full in the eyes. But a cold rope dragged itself down my spine and of a sudden my hands felt clammy with sweat. He must have seen something of what went on in my mind because he went on quickly:

"Yeah! Sounds goofy. Really insane. But true. As I stand here with you, it's the truth. And there's even more. I guess I just stared at the damned cat. Suddenly it moved back and forth against the bars in that sinuous walk only cats have. After a few turns it came back and faced me again. It was just as though its mind was troubled and the turns it took enabled it to clear its mind

for what it wanted to say. 'She brought me here to prove something. But now I'm in this prison and only *she* can get me out. You must help me. . . .'

"There were words trembling on my lips but they simply wouldn't pass. I was speechless. Yet he read my mind. For he answered the words which had formed in me. 'You are the only person on this planet who can help me. Project your thoughts into the great void. Call, *Luria*. . . . And when the answer comes, say that Mokar believes. . . .'

"I guess I was in a sort of mental fog for a while after that because the next remembrance was of my studio. I sort of came out of the trance I was in and found myself on the couch. I know that I had left the zoo and driven back to the studio; I must have! Anyway, the first thought in my mind was what Mokar had said. I did it. . . ."

"Did what, Hank?" I breathed softly.

"Called to this *Luria*."

"And . . .?"

"She not only answered, she came to me. Not in flesh," he hastily assured me. "It was a sort of picture I got of her. Oh, man! What a picture though. I deal in beauty. Now and then we run across some beautiful models. But this *Luria*. . . . Out of this world is the only way to describe her. Her skin was white as the proverbial snow and yet it had an odd pinkish glow to it. Her hair was midnight and it sparkled as though a million snow flakes were reflecting light from it. She wore a breastplate which concealed her charms yet barely covered the swelling flesh so that my breath was taken from me. Below the plate she was bare to her loins which again were covered by a leather belt from which dangled a jeweled dagger. In her hand, the right one, she carried a spear with an immense blade, slim, and murderous looking.

"She was clothed in mist which

swirled and eddied about her. Because of this strange mist the picture was none too clear except in glimpses. But the oddest part of the whole scene was a something that lurked in the background. Lurked is the only word for it. It was never clear at all. I got the feeling of a long body, wetly metallic-looking and covered by a serrated series of spines. But as I say, I'm not sure. Maybe that was the proof of my hallucinated state."

I released my breath in a sigh and said:

"The wrong one of us is writing. I'd say this dame brought out the poet in you, Hank. Never have I heard a woman described so. Now look . . ."

"I was sober. More sober than at any time of my life," he said, as though he knew what I was going to say. "But let me finish. The message of Mokar came to my mind and I saw her lips smile. They formed words and across the misty dimness came the answer, 'Tell Mokar I shall come for him soon.' He hesitated for an instant, open and closed his mouth and finally said nothing.

"And that's the last you've ever heard of or seen the beautiful dream gal, *Luria*?" I said.

He shook his head, yes.

I DIDN'T know what to say. Hank Sharpe was my dearest friend. He was a mixture of the strangest things, for at one and the same time he was the most hard-headed, clear-thinking man I'd ever known; and at the same time the world's greatest romanticist. He spoke of the evil of man with a knowing look. Yet he could not believe evil of anyone. He was as small as I and even thinner, and no one has ever called me, big-boy, but he was as strong as a horse with hands that were like a carpenter's, tough and muscular. I've seen him slap a guy and send the guy all the way

across a tavern floor with that slap. He had a head that was bit too large for the rest of him, with a face that was long and lean and handsome. And there was nothing I wouldn't do for the guy. . . . But this deal he was talking of sounded like a hashish dream.

It couldn't be, though.

There might be a way of finding out, I thought of a sudden. "Look, Hank," I said. "Let's mosey over to the cat house. I want to see something."

There was quite a crowd on the outside. Evidently the word of the fight had spread and they had gathered to see what there was to be seen. There wasn't much. What blood had flowed had been washed clean by the hoses. Of the cats nothing was to be seen. We strolled around and walked into the huge place. It was apparent which cage the panthers were in by the crowd watching. We joined the others.

Being on the small side we edged our way through the crowd until we stood against the iron railing which separated the cages from the spectators. The animals in the cage were restless. Whether it was the fight which had made them so or something else, they paced back and forth, growls rumbling deep in their throats and sometimes coming past the furry pockets. Oddly enough, the largest and most ferocious, the huge jet-black beast whose name was Mokar, was the least restive. He lolled at his ease on the shelf which they used for resting and sleeping.

He was lying there until he spotted us. Then with an immense and effortless leap he was at the bars, his great yellow eyes searching our faces. Suddenly it happened. I swear Mokar smiled. Those fearsome lips parted in a huge cat's grin.

And Hank turned to me and said:

"Let's go. He understood."

It was just too much for me. I shook my head and started to follow Hank.

But I hadn't done more than make a half-turn when he gripped my forearm so hard I *yipped* in pain.

"It's her," he whispered in a voice of awe.

Like a flash I followed the direction of his eyes and beheld her. I *knew* it was her. Yet she was like night and day as far as accuracy of description. Only in the small wave of hair which peeked beneath the hood of her coat was there something of what he'd described, the hair whose blackness held the sheen of a million reflected snowflakes. Her skin too was as he said. But that face! It was the face of a million men's dreams. So alluring, so innocent, eyes that begged for love, and knew only virtue, lips whose redness made one hungry for their touch, and a skin that was like a flower petal. I felt my fingers contract in a spasm, as though they had a will to fly toward that loveliness for a caress.

"Your friend likes me," the girl said.

She had spoken and in perfectly understandable English.

"I'm glad," she went on. "Mokar will be too."

"He will?" I said.

"But of course. He has learned his lesson and I have found what I looked for. Now we will go out of this place of prison into the clean air. Come!"

IT WAS a command. And we followed. She led us directly to one of the open-air confectionery stands. She walked up and ordered an ice cream cone. I reached for the dime automatically. But Hank ordered two more and paid for them. She turned and walked to a bench close by. We followed as if we were tied to her by a string. So we sat, the three of us, munching on our cones until the last of them were licked up. All the while she sat and stared at anything and everything but us.

She sighed breathless after a while and still looking straight ahead, said:

"It is good not to be alone. Poor Mokar. He missed me and could not get through the valley of the mists to me. Luckily he found you, my friend."

Hank is a slow-acting guy most of the time. Then again he acts with the speed of a fighter throwing a counter punch. This was one of those times. Suddenly his hands imprisoned hers and he was facing her.

"Uh, huh," Hank said. "That's right. He found me and you found me. So that makes everything just right. But where does it leave me?"

She was innocence itself. "How do you mean?"

"Who are you? Where do you come from? What's this all about, this business with Mokar; how did you manage to hypnotize me into the dream I had?" Hank shook her hands imprisoned in his for emphasis.

She didn't answer immediately but looked down at her hands which were beginning to show a redness from the tightness of his grip. Hank flushed and released her hands. She threw back her head in an odd gesture and the hood fell away from those beautiful tresses which fell in a wonderfully effective wave about her shoulders. Even I, who can take my women or leave them alone, felt a thrill at the sight.

"I am Luria," she said. "You know that. And I come from the valley of the mists. . . ."

"You come in dreams," Hank said. "In dreams of mist and terror."

I gaped at the man. What the heck had gotten into him? He had turned so that his profile was to us. This time it was she who took the initiative. She took hold of his hands and began to talk:

"I came to you across the great void. It was hard for I was already here and

I had to transpose my soul-self back to the place from whence I'd come. There is no other but you who can understand me. Yet we live side by side. Our worlds are the same. The same in the same time. Will you come back with me and live in this side-by-side world? The time has come when I have need of you. . . ."

"Wait a minute, Hank!" I broke in before he could give this girl an answer. "Don't listen to her. It's some sort of gimmick she's got that's working you. I don't trust her."

"I do, Berk," he said. "I know she's in trouble. I guess I knew it, from the beginning. And I want you to come along with us."

"Oh boy!" I chortled in simulated glee. "Ain't that going to be just ducky. Come on along and play, he says. And how do we do that? Hold hands across a table while the lights are out and wait for the *message*?"

"You're not scared, are you?" he asked.

"Now we're playing kid games," I said. "*I dare you* . . ."

HE TURNED again so that he was facing her. "Is it possible to bring my friend along?"

She nodded. The wrinkle went out of his forehead and a smile lighted his face. He got up and stepped in front of me.

"Well?" he asked.

"Well what?" I was mad. Yet at the same time I felt a thrill of excitement. If, I thought, if such a thing could be, why I could write of it later. Fame and fortune could be waiting for me at the end of the trail. But what the heck were we dreaming of? The whole thing was a lot of talk. Dream stuff and coincidence. I snorted loudly. Hank turned back to her and said:

"See. It's my personal charm. He can't resist it. It's because I smoke

Regents. They give off that wonderful aroma and make me nonchalant. Also an outcast. Berk smells that way naturally."

"Mokar will be glad," she says. "He likes your friend."

"Yeah?" I said, quick-like. "Well, I like him too. Just where he's at, behind bars."

"Oh," she said just as quickly. "He won't be for very long. When you get to know him better you'll grow much more fond of him. He's so affectionate."

"Then he and Hank'll get along swell. Hank's an animal lover. Now why couldn't he have been crazy about fish? I've always been wild about mermaids," I said.

Hank hummed a bit about, "wild about Nellie." I was too far from him to get in a kick at his shins. Suddenly she rose. It was a movement that was as lithe and sinuous as an animal's. Her fingers threw the hood back around her hair. Hank started to join her but she shook her head.

"No. I must go alone . . ." she said.

"But how . . .?"

She knew what he meant. "I will come to you when the time comes," she said. "Nor will it be long."

I covered a grin. Now she was cooking with butane. So she was going to come when the time was ripe. I figured we'd better not hold our breaths that long. We'd probably be ripe too.

But Hank was all trust and hope. He acted like a kid with the promise of a day at the circus before him. His eyes were shining in anticipation of the day. Man alive! You'd think he was ten instead of thirty. His eyes followed her trim, but very trim, figure until it disappeared into the big cat house.

"Okay kid," I said. "You can wake up. Dream's over."

His lips were bent in a crooked grin but his eyes were dark in some inner

thought which was extremely pleasant.

". . . Not yet," he said after a moment.

IT WAS some day in the week, I think Tuesday; at any rate it wasn't long after our visit to the zoo, that I got a phone call from Hank. I was busy on a fantasy for FANTASTIC ADVENTURES that had to do with flying disks and I wanted to get some of the facts in order. I had a fistful of clippings on my desk, a cigarette burning itself to death in the ashtray, and a brow full of wrinkles on my forehead. The phone at my side rang and I cursed it as I lifted it from the cradle.

"Yeah!"

"Berk!" Hank's voice crackled in excitement. "Come on over. But fast!"

Oh fine, I thought. He's been dreaming again. Then another thought pierced me through. Maybe . . .?

"You mean . . .?" I began.

"Right. Drop what you're doing and shoot out here."

"But look," I began. There was no need to go on, unless I wanted to talk to myself. He'd hung up. Believe me I was in just that mood, talking to myself, I mean. The disk story had to be on the editor's desk by Friday. And I had a good six thousand words to do on it yet. The air was blue with nasty words as I shoved the chair away from the desk and put the old money-machine away. Now why did Hank have to dream, I thought as I put on a pair of slacks! I work in shorts and nothing else. A tee shirt followed the slacks and then socks and shoes. I gave the desk a look of regret as I turned for a last look before closing the door. It was going to be a long time before I saw that desk or room again.

Hank shared a loft studio on north State Street with a couple of other

artists. He was alone, sitting before his work desk. There was a half-finished pen and ink drawing on the board. He heard my clattering steps on the rickety stairs and met me at the door. He grabbed my wrist and dragged me into his part of the studio.

"Last night," he began without preamble. "She came to me. She said she would see me again this afternoon. She was in trouble. I saw it in her face. I've got to help her. Berk, *we've* got to help her."

I tried to throw some cold water on him. The whole deal had lost its appeal to me. What the heck! I had this story to do for the boss and besides . . . I found a seat among the magazines on a chair and said:

"Now listen to me, Hank. I'm serious. I went along with this dream-book stuff you gave me because I thought it was some kind of a gag. I didn't know it was serious. But if it is you'd better see a psychiatrist. Hallucinations may be all right until they reach the stage where a man can't tell them from reality.

"I guess it's time we talked this thing over seriously. I don't know how it began but I can hazard a guess. I'll bet you went to a party with some of those wacky friends of yours and there was a hypnotist there. And so the gag was for him to use you as a guinea pig. I'll bet there was this gal we met, at the party. The idea being to see how far post-hypnotism would work. I've got to hand it to the lad who did the hypnotizing. He did an A-1 Job."

"Uh uh," Hank said. "You're wrong. You're . . ."

We both noticed it at the same time. All of a sudden there was a terrific breeze in the room. I started to close the window, only I didn't make it. It was as if someone had glued me to the chair I was in. I could see, hear, smell,

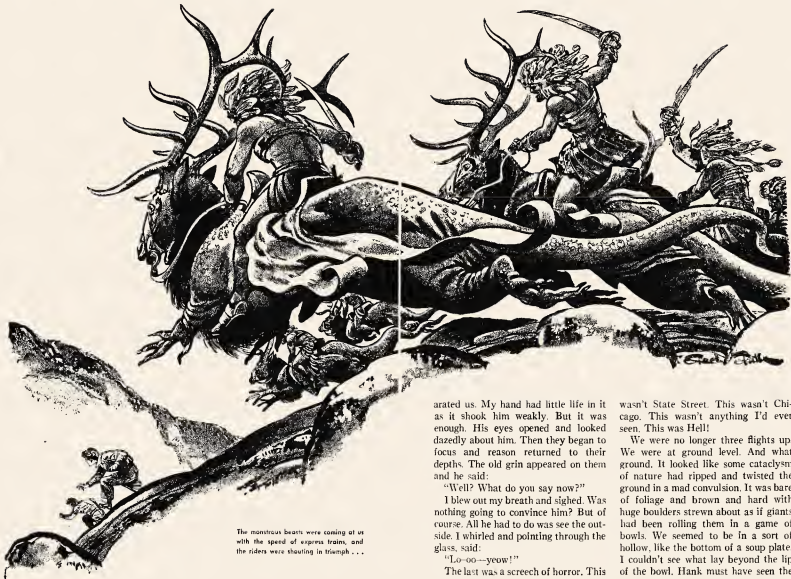
reason, but couldn't act. I was aware of what was going on only I seemed not to be part of it.

I say there was a great gust of blowing in the room. Yet not a paper stirred, not a leaf in the magazines turned. In fact not a material thing felt the wind's effect except Hank and myself. I saw his hair blowing about his face, saw his shirt collar flap against his chin and knew the same thing was happening to me. I was turned three-quarters to the window and though I couldn't turn completely I saw that not a leaf stirred on a tree directly outside the window. Not a bit of dust blew. And I even saw a man mop his brow below us. The wind increased and with it came a cloud of darkness. It's the only way I can describe it. It was a mist of inky blackness and it flowed up from out of nowhere. I tried to move out of its path. I could feel my muscles strain as I did my utmost to lift myself from its path as it rolled toward Hank and me. But though the sweat stood out on my forehead in huge damp drops and rolled down my arms and chest, all my efforts were unavailing. The black curtain enveloped us. It not only encircled us so that nothing was to be seen beyond it, it also did something to our minds. For suddenly all was darkness.

THERE was a dull feeling at the back of my head. And my neck felt stiff. I opened my eyes and looked blankly about me. We were both still sitting as we had been. Hank looked asleep. I shook my head and instantly realized the spell or whatever it was was gone.

"Hey! Hank! Wake up fella."

As I called to him I rose from my chair. I groaned aloud as every bone in my body ached with the effort. My words seemed to have no effect. I staggered a bit in the few feet which sep-



The monstrous beasts were coming at us with the speed of express trains, and the riders were shouting in triumph . . .

arated us. My hand had little life in it as it shook him weakly. But it was enough. His eyes opened and looked dazedly about him. Then they began to focus and reason returned to their depths. The old grin appeared on them and he said:

"Well? What do you say now?"

I blew out my breath and sighed. Was nothing going to convince him? But of course. All he had to do was see the outside. I whirled and pointing through the glass, said:

"Lo-oo--yeow!"

The last was a screech of horror. This

wasn't State Street. This wasn't Chicago. This wasn't anything I'd ever seen. This was Hell!

We were no longer three flights up. We were at ground level. And what ground. It looked like some cataclysm of nature had ripped and twisted the ground in a mad convulsion. It was bare of foliage and brown and hard with huge boulders strewn about as if giants had been rolling them in a game of bowls. We seemed to be in a sort of hollow, like the bottom of a soup plate. I couldn't see what lay beyond the lip of the bowl. Hank must have seen the

terror and bewilderment in my eyes. He rose and stepped to my side.

"Holy cats!" he breathed softly.

"I could think of other things," I said. "All appropriate to the landscape."

"Save it!" he said sharply. "Let's take a look around."

Too anxious I wasn't to see what there was to be seen. But I wouldn't have stayed alone in the room for all the tea in China. Matter of fact I hoped we *were* in China. But at the pit of my stomach was a feeling we weren't in China. It was the kind of feeling which said, brother, you're in the next place to where you've always said you're going.

If Hank had any fears they were well concealed. He moved along, head up and shoulders back like he knew exactly where he was going. My steps lagged but only a few yards behind his. We climbed the few feet to the lip of the earthen bowl and looked about. I know my mouth hung open and that to anyone who might have been looking on I played the part of an idiot very well. At least I had company.

THE ground fell away below our feet steeply for a distance of perhaps a thousand feet. Below us lay a sight to gladden the heart of any farmer. The ground was checkerboarded in neat patterns that sometimes were squares and sometimes rectangles and sometimes even triangles of color. There were trees, heavy-planted like parklands and we could see areas which looked dark with luxurious growth. The air was warm and fragrant and peaceful. It was a placid scene.

But only for a moment.

Immediately below us the ground was sheer. But to either side the slope was gradual. Suddenly there was a great snorting chorus of animal sounds to our

right and we turned as one to see what made them. I've been scared before. But this was the first time I'd ever been so frightened that I knew what it was to be rooted to one spot.

Coming up at us with the speed of express trains were some ten or fifteen animals the likes of which I'd never seen. They were part lizard and part elk. There was the head of an elk mounted on a lizard's body. But such a lizard as I didn't believe existed. I didn't wait for Hank's shout of warning. I had already turned and started downward for the place we had just quitted. But my terror rose to a fevered pitch when I saw that there was nothing there. The room or vehicle of transport into this strange and terrible world had disappeared. There was nothing but the convulsed earth and boulders.

It wouldn't have made any difference anyway. These monstrous beasts were too swift.

Now there was the sounds of voices about us, English voices; commands to halt, shouts of anger and some of speculation. Then above the others, a bull-like bellow:

"Stop, fools. Stop ere we rip you apart!"

We came to a sliding stop and side by side waited for, I guess, death. The beasts ground to dust-clouded stops. Then as their riders dismounted they looked at us through their soft strangely gentle eyes. But there was nothing peaceful or gentle in the eyes or faces of the men who surrounded us. Oh no! They looked fierce and very unwelcoming.

I essayed a grin and swallowed hastily as the first of them came close. Beside me Hank's breath whistled shrilly as he tensed in anticipation of battle. Not that we stood any chance if there was going to be. Not with the way these babies were adorned.

Insofar as size was concerned they looked no bigger than most men from where we'd come. Nor were they any different in facial or physical characteristics, except maybe in fierceness of looks. It was just their get-up. They wore little helmets, serrated and adorned with a strip of feather. Their chests were covered by a wide strip of metal leaving their bellies bare. They wore gauntlets of the same metal and their legs were also covered to some three inches above their knees. The metal was very flexible because it gave as they walked. From their waists to where the leg covering began was a kind of link-metal skirt. It rang metallically as they moved about. There was a belt of leather about their waists. From it hung, on one side a dagger, and on the other a sword.

"Who are you? From whence come you?" asked one who was evidently the leader. He was the biggest and certainly looked the most fierce, a scar which ran the length of one cheek to his chin, giving him the most terrifying look.

My mouth opened and closed, opened and closed but no sound came out. It was Hank who took the lead:

"I am Henry Sharpe. And this is Berkeley Livingston," he said. "We come from—from Chicago," he ended weakly.

I knew how he felt. But what the devil were we to say to those questions.

THE leader of this strange troop mulled the words over to himself as though they were some strange food he was tasting. His eyes were on the ground as he mumbled to himself. Suddenly they lifted and pierced us with their fiery glance. I felt my knees turn to water at that uncompromising stare. I knew I was too young to die.

"Of this place from whence you come I have no knowledge," the big guy said.

"Perhaps Loko may have. He is all-wise. Mount these men and let us be off before we are discovered. We are still a long way from home."

Immediately his men began a tuneless whistling at which their strange mounts came trotting. One of them gave me a hand and I slid up until I sat just outside the pocket of the flat saddle they used. Hank too was lifted to the back of one of the elk-lizard deals and in an instant we were off. And I mean off and running. Man oh man! How those babies could travel! They'd have walked off with all honors at any track in the U. S.

I don't know exactly how long we rode. Time had no meaning. Our watches had stopped. The sun stood at the zenith all the time. All I know is that my back was sore, my legs were numb and that this character behind whom I was riding had never taken a bath in his life. The only thing which held meaning for me was the changes in scenery. For perhaps a mile after we started, the road or path or whatever it was we followed was level and flat. Then we came to a forest land into which we rode with the same abandon as before. The trees were thick and the branches often swept low so that I was continually ducking to stop from being swept off my mount. This went on for hours, it seemed. Then we were in the open again. But the topography had changed. The gentle slopes were gone. This was hill country, rough and a little frightening. We didn't ride directly upward but at a long slant. I didn't notice at first but later I did that we always rode where there was some sort of shelter. The open places were avoided with assiduous care.

My fears lessened or dulled, as the ride went on interminably, and I looked about with more appraising glances. For a land which held the appearances of

care there were less people about than I would imagine there to be. Since the sun was always at zenith, time had little meaning, at least in the sense we have of time. This might be the time for sleep or dinner or lunch or breakfast for all I knew. At least they were reasons for the lack of activity in this weird place of ever-sunlight.

Suddenly I was hungry. But I mean hungry. It wasn't just a gnawing feeling. It was a flood of demands for food. My rider was in the center of the troop. Hank was up ahead somewhere not far from the leader. I was too far back to see the gesture which was the command to halt but there came shouted words from ahead:

"Halt! Eat. Eat. . ."

My rider kicked with his right heel at the leathery side of the beast we were riding and the monster slid to a halt. We slid off and joined the rest. I was stiff and sore as I found a seat beside Hank on a grassy bummock. There was a far-away look in his eyes and it wasn't one of hunger. For once my interest was not on his thoughts or mood. I was *hungry*.

I GUESS I looked my disgust when I saw the meal we were to have. It came from saddle bags which were attached to the animals we had been riding. My buddy strode up to me and held the unappetizing piece of leathery whatever-it-was in his hand.

"Well, bless your little," I said. "That's decent of you, old man, I must say."

He had a half smile on his lips as he stood there with the stuff in his hand. At my words the smile went away, but fast, and his free hand shot out and cuffed me alongside the jaw.

"I am not an old man!" he said in vicious tones.

Now, I'm a peace-loving individual.

The sort of guy, in fact, who will not just walk away from trouble, I'll *run* from it. Comes a tavern brawl and I'm the first to head for under the table. In an argument I'm the oil-spreader. So maybe it was that I was hungry and tired and sore. Or maybe I was guttier than I thought. But suddenly before I could reason I was on my feet and at this character.

I bit him with a left and right and another left and right, all on the puss. Then I shot one to his belly and he folded up like a wind-broken accordion. A last right, this one on the button, and he spun away for about ten feet to land flat on his back.

It all happened pretty fast. Faster than the telling of it. What happened after was just as quick. Instantly, the rest of these characters came at a run, the big guy who was boss-man at their head. He looked down at schmoe on the grass looking up at the blue, with vacant eyes, then looked at me. There was a puzzled glint to his eyes.

"What happened?" he asked.

I was surprised at the politeness of tone.

"I don't go for slapping around," I said.

"No? I must tell you then," he said in that same polite tone, "that certain formalities must be observed. As soon as Hago has recovered his senses he will ask for reprisals. It is the custom here, my friend."

"Yeah!" Hank said sharply, as only a Sharpe can ask. "And what will those be?"

"Edged with tips of steel of course," the big guy said casually.

"Hey!" Hank said angrily. "Berk doesn't know anything about duelling with swords."

Nor about duelling with anything else but my mouth, I thought. Maybe we could fight a duel that way. Of course

I hadn't done badly with my fists . . .

The big guy shrugged his shoulders and all the metal he carried clanked an accompaniment. Hank brought up another point:

"Besides, Berk doesn't have the protection of armor."

"Then it will be over quickly," the big goon said.

Suddenly Hank grinned. A fine time to smile, I thought. I was going to die, and Ray Palmer wasn't going to get that story after all, and all Sharpe the sharpy can do is laugh about it. My bosom buddy. My pal. Hank, I thought, if ever you ask me to listen to one of those corny jokes you like to tell, I'll throw Joe Miller down your throat.

"And what of Loko?" Hank asked. "Won't he be angry?"

The big guy stroked the scar on his cheek. He nodded several times as though in agreement with what Hank had brought up. Then he too smiled and I thought; Hank, bosom buddy, you're a prince. With the wit you're fast like a rabbit. Now why didn't I think of that?"

"Yes. Loko would be angry, especially if he knew there had been two of you and I brought only one in. . . ."

BOTH Hank and I stopped smiling. The familiar chill found its groove and raced down my spine. I didn't need an interpretation of what he said. In effect, the less Loko knew the less he would be angry about.

The rest of the gang, with the exception of Hago, had gathered around while the palavar had been going on. They ringed us in with a fence of steel for their swords were out. I looked from face to face and found nothing in any to give me hope of the future. I swallowed the lump which formed in my throat and wished I could be brave and come up with the kind of quip the usual

story-book hero had in a moment like this. Blank. That was my mind.

But not Hank's. Oh, no. He had things to say. I wished he hadn't. Seemed like every time he opened his yap trouble came out.

"Is this how you welcome strangers?" he asked.

If nothing else the big guy liked to chew the fat!

"Strangers are never welcome here on Hosay. They are always troublesome. This way our troubles, and yours, incidentally, will soon be over, and the path of our lives will be smooth again."

"We didn't ask to come here," Hank said.

That was a lie but at this point of the game I didn't think it made any difference.

"No-o? Then how did you come?"

"Luria made us," Hank said.

By all that was holy, I'd forgotten about the gorgeous doll who had brought us this trouble. I remembered now and blessed her with a few choice epithets, none of which would look nice in print.

"Luria!" his voice rose until it almost sounded feminine. "She brought you across the void? Ho-ho! Loko will surely want to see you. Well, Hago can wait his vengeance for a bit. I don't think you will be leaving Hosay very soon. . . . Well, we've spent enough time in talk. Let us eat and be off again."

Funny how my appetite got lost. I took maybe two bites out of the leathery stuff. But even though I'd lost my hunger I had to admit to the tastiness of the stuff. Then we were back in the saddle and riding hell-bent for wherever they were going. Whether my muscles had grown used to the gruelling pace or just that I'd grown numb I don't know. But now I didn't feel so weary. So that in the end when we topped a rise and came to the valley which held the tribe

of Loko, I felt an odd sense of awareness of things.

I say it was a valley. Actually it wasn't. But on first appearance it seemed that. Rather to be proper it was a plain which stretched for a vast distance and which lay between two ranges of hills that were not quite high enough to be called mountains. As we rode down the shallow pass which led to the city I speculated on the familiarity of the place. As we got closer I knew what the resemblance was. It looked like the stretch of pueblos in Taos, New Mexico. Of course there was the difference of soil conditions and mountain stretches. But I'm speaking of the habitations. Our coming had been noticed long before our arrival and a great number of riders came dashing out to meet us, all mounted on the elk-lizards.

They yelled, shouted and waved their swords about as they closed in on our small company. Pandemonium is a long word, but it's the only one which fit the situation. We must have stretched out for a good mile as we rode down the long street between the pueblos until we reached the most imposing, one that was a good five stories high.

This one was different from the rest in that instead of the ladder it had a broad staircase which circled about the entire structure. Then, while the others waited, Hank and I, between several guards, mounted the staircase and proceeded upward behind the big guy who was the leader of the troop.

AT THE fifth story we came to a broad gate. There were armed sentries standing guard before it. Through the open lattice-work of iron I could see other men standing watch. Whoever Loko was he liked protection. The big guy exchanged words with the guards, who in turn called something to those inside and the gates swung open. There

was something ominous in the way those huge iron things closed behind us.

Once more we went on the march. We had come into a shallow courtyard. Birds of brilliant plumage sang from trees. The courtyard was circular with several entrances to the building we had as our goal. The center entrance was for us. Straight for it and into the coolness of a vast room where all was peace the big guy led us. Here we came to a halt. I looked about and wondered why we stopped here. The room had but a single entrance or exit, the doorway through which we'd come. The answer came in a few seconds.

Suddenly we started to rise, all of us. And I knew we were on a sort of platform much like that of a stage. It was then I saw the openings high in the walls above. There were three, quite large. When we reached the level of these openings the platform stopped its ascent, and once more we stepped forward. Again it was the center opening which was our goal. This too had guards and after the usual exchange of talk we were allowed entry.

It was a long rectangular room in which we found ourselves. At one end was a dais on which was a long table. There were six men sitting at this table. The walls of the room to either side of the dais held couches and seats. The room was empty but for the men up ahead. We were led forward until we stopped some fifteen feet from the dais. Then the big guy stepped forward.

"Mighty Loko," he began. "I am Captain Mita, in charge of the group who went in search of the holy Groana bird. I have come before your greatness with a strange story . . ."

All the while I'd been giving this Loko character the once-over. I didn't know he was Loko until Mita called him by name. But he *was* the sort of person you give a second and even a third

glance. The trouble was I didn't look at the rest. Not until Hank nudged me and whispered from the side of his mouth:

"The women! Look at them."

It was small wonder that I hadn't noticed them. As I said, I thought there were six men up there in front of us. They were all dressed alike except Loko. Their uniforms were much like Mita's except they were more elaborate with jewels sending showers of varicolored lights at us. Then I saw the breastplates and realized for the first time that of the six people up there four were women.

The fifth was a giant of a man, easily, even though he was seated, better than seven feet tall. The sixth was Loko. He was dressed in a toga-like gown which fell in a straight line from his thin wrinkled neck to his feet. From the center of the toga straight down the center was a line of color demarcation. One side of the robe was a bright purple, the other a deep green. Then Loko started to talk, and I forgot all else:

"Who are these two? From whence come they? And how did you come upon them?"

CAPTAIN MITA related how he found us. All went well until he mentioned Luria. I thought they'd leap down our collective throats so great was their excitement. All but Loko. His lean face didn't show a muscle change and his eyes peered narrowly down at us as though their piercing glance could read what lay beneath the flesh and bone of our foreheads. Their voices rose in shrill cacophony, the gist of which was we ought to be put to death immediately. Suddenly Loko raised a thin arm which shook slightly.

"Peace! This chattering, as though you were but birds in the courtyard to whom had been cast seed. Peace, I say!

"Are your minds so dulled by the games of war that they see only what lies on the surface? Look ye well on these strangers. Do they have the look of any men we know? They have not spoken their minds yet but I'll warrant their speech is foreign as their attire. They knew not of swordplay. One used his fists as a weapon. But all this non-observance can be forgiven. It is in the misconstruing of the fact they knew Luria that I speak. Let me assure ye they are accidental arrivals here on Pola. There are some things which are as open pages to us. But the art of transposing humans from one plane of time to another is the closed page which not one of us can open, for we have not the key. Not even Luria, the all-wise woman.

"Oman, the father of Luria, was the wisest man who ever lived. The small knowledge I have was gained at his knee. But even he, with all the secrets of the ancients at his mind's disposal could not do that. I do not say that she, in some fashion known only to her, was able to bring them across the great void between the land of the eternal mists, from the place from whence they came to Pola. But only these two came.

"I do not know who they are or why they were brought here, but look ye well on them. Can ye see the smallest sign in them which would bring harm to us or disturb the smallest detail of our plan?"

The old character was *right*. We were a couple of harmless schmoes. As far as I was concerned I had had my fill of this place. All I wanted was to be put back on that black cloud and taken back to that place, 'from whence we'd come.'

"However," he went on, "it would be of great interest to us to find *how, where and when* Luria managed all this. Shall we ask them?"

Mita's boys acted too fast for us to

do anything about it. They were well-trained. Loko had barely finished talking and our arms were pinioned behind our backs. I started to struggle but gave up as the guard's arms tightened about me. Yet a strange fact registered at the back of my mind, a fact I was going to put to use later, I knew. This guy holding my arms behind me was straining all his muscles in the effort and yet if I wanted to I could have quite easily broken his grip.

The guy who had been sitting beside Loko was better than seven feet tall. The instant we became helpless the five of them left their companion on the dais and swarmed about us.

"So they like to use the fist, eh?" he had a bellow like a hull. He stood spraddle-legged in front of us, his arms akimbo. He threw his head back and let out a roar of laughter. The sound echoed around the huge room. I had to strain to look up at him, he was that big.

"Sure," I said. "What's more, I'd use them on you too, you big schmoe. . ."

HE THREW a punch at me that was telegraphed like a slow freight through Missouri. I ducked just as it arrived. Only I forgot about the guy behind me. I ducked backward and my head cracked against his face and came forward in a rebound, smack into that ham-like fist. I won't say it felt like being hit by a pillow. On the other hand I've been hit a lot harder, a heck of a lot. I shook my head clear and grinned up at the no-longer smiling face.

"Better try again," I said. "That I can take all day."

Me and my big yap. Boy, did I take the lumps! He hit me with everything but that meat cleaver he carried at his side and he'd have probably used that except he was that mad. I was covered with blood, mine, and he was covered

with glory, when he got through. At least it sounded like an ovation he got. I staggered to my feet and looked to where Hank was.

He had that beefy look around his jawbones too. It was the first time either of us had been jumped by a gang of women. I guess Hank was thankful this was one world where women didn't have the pregorative of scratching. He'd of been a lot bloodier than he was. On the other hand it isn't the most pleasant thing to have women pounding lumps on you.

But though his head was bloodied it wasn't bowed. He winked at me. I thought it *looked* like a wink. Of course with all that swelling around his eyes it could have been something else. I grinned back at him and the two of them turned to face the gang that had jumped us. They were standing together just in front of the dais. Evidently they'd been talking to the old goat they'd left at the table.

"I see," Loko said, "your planet breeds stuhhorn men. A pity. Because we have the means to undo those stuh-born tongues. I would very much dislike causing any additional suffering. Unless, of course, you force my hand. . ."

"Perhaps," Hank managed to get out between his puffed lips, "if we knew exactly what you wanted, we might cooperate?"

Loko repeated the sixty-four dollar question again. The others gave us dirty looks and shoved their fists down to the hardware at their belts. But I was more interested in Hank. He had that thoughtful look on his face. It was kind of hard to figure what the look he had was due to the swelling. I just guessed.

"Okay!" Hank said in decisive tones. "It was like this. . ."

LOKO'S fingers sounded a tatoo on the table-top. He chewed his upper

lip with his lower for a few seconds, then said:

"It has the ring of truth, this tale you tell. Enough to warrant a surety that in the tale is a greater part of it. I know that Oman, Luria's father, was interested in the transmigration of bodies from one sphere to another, though I didn't know he had gone so far. But the fact remains that it was an experiment, otherwise she would have met you two. Still, as things stand, perhaps she was busied in other matters. . . .?"

One of the dames had cackled in laughter at the words. Her laugh was stilled at the look the old guy shot her. Yet it seemed to me that there wasn't anything in those mild old eyes to make me shut up that way.

"In any event, I think we had better place you in safe custody for the while. Captain Mita . . ."

"Sire?"

"Have these men placed in the cage on the topmost tier. And I shall expect a vigilant guard to be put over them. They are bait for the beautiful Luria."

I got it then. It was too late to do anything about it, of course. Because even as I turned to give battle, one of the boys behind me jabbed my spine with his steel tickler, and I turned yellow like a dandelion in the spring. I was going to be a live coward.

"Okay, wise guy," I said. "You win. As for you, you big schmo," this to the lug who had taken his picks on me, "some day you and I'll meet under better auspices and then . . ."

* * *

The gate clanged shut behind us. I stepped over to the pallet in the corner and sat on the straw. Hank stayed close to the bars, his back to me.

"Might as well take it easy, Hank," I said. "This looks like the kind of place that's going to grow on us. We might as well take it easy, like I say. We might

be here a long time."

"Y'know," Hank said, "something funny happened down there. When that guard grabbed me and held my arms behind me, I felt as though all I had to do was twist and he'd go flying."

I sat straighter. Hank too. . . . I winced as I grinned in reply to something which had occurred too. Maybe the big guy hadn't knocked me cold but he sure had damaged me a bit.

"And that does us good here," I said.

"No. Nor did it do any good down there, either. Those stickers they had, carried more weight than our fists. It's just something we ought to keep in mind. Of course, the thing to remember now is that Luria knows we're here. . . ."

"She does?" I guess my voice was a bit on the sarcastic side. He turned like a shot and stepped to my side. I didn't like the look in his eyes.

"Listen! And get this straight!" he snapped. "I don't want any wrong cracks about that girl. . . ."

I laughed and waved my hands in a gesture of good-will. "Just talking, Hank," I said.

His fingers waved a pattern in front of my eyes:

"So stop talking and listen. She said she'd see us here. And not to worry."

"Not to worry, eh? Well, that's good to know. So what are we supposed to do while we're here, count the straws on the bed?"

"I don't know. She just said not to worry. That she'd get to us."

I GRUNTED something in disgust and stretched out on the straw. It got under my shirt collar, into my trousers, my ears and even in my socks. I thought, if she were going to get here, to do it soon. A little more of this and I'll go wacky. After a bit Hank got tired of supporting the bars and came down to sit by my side. He hummed a

snatch of a popular tune. It was his way of being deep in thought. Me, I was also deep in thought, thought of a steak at Gus's.

I'm a bit deaf in one ear and after listening to that tuneless humming of Hank's for a while I turned my good ear to the straw and faced the wall. The masonry wasn't in too good a condition. In fact it was cracked and flakes of grey stuff lay like dandruff on the surface of the wall. I began to peel some of the stuff. It peeled like wallpaper, and like wallpaper, some of it stuck. I yanked at it, then in anger punched at it. My fist almost went through the wall.

I yelled in pain and Hank turned to see what had happened. One look and he was crawling to my side.

"Hey," he whispered in excitement. "What goes?"

"I don't know," I whispered in return. "But this stuff's about as strong as oatmeal mush. Have a crack at it but first put your hanky around your knuckles."

As I said before, Hank, though a small man, had the muscles and hands of a carpenter. When he slammed his wrapped fist into that masonry something gave and it wasn't his hand. That simply disappeared into the wall almost to his elbow. I knelt on the bed behind him, grabbed him about the middle and yanked backward. We fell off the bed as the hand came out of the wall faster than we thought.

"My God!" Hank said in disgust as he stared at the hole in the wall. "Are we dopes. There's a ram we could have used and we go around bustin' knuckles."

I knew what he meant. The bed. It had a metal frame. In a few seconds the bed was apart. We used the long metal sides as rams. It wasn't more than a couple of seconds later that light

streamed through the twin holes we made in the wall. What surprised me was that no one had heard us with all the racket we were making. But I certainly didn't care. Dust and bits of stone fell about us in a grey shower as we widened the holes into one large hole. It was big enough after a few moments for the both of us to crawl through side by side. So we did.

We came out on a sort of balcony. Since the building was circular the balcony was also circular. There was a ledge perhaps a couple of feet high acting as a break against the straight drop. I peered downward and saw that there was no escape that way. And we had to escape. Because the instant we were through, the patrons of this bastille began a caterwauling of sound that should have awakened the dead. Only it wasn't the dead we were worrying about.

"Up! The roof. It's our only chance," Hank shouted and started up the sill of the prison we'd just quitted.

The wall, I saw then, was not flat or smooth. There were serrations and rough spots which were deep in the stone. One didn't have to be an acrobat to ascend but it would have helped. Then we were on the roof.

As far as I could see we hadn't gotten anywhere except up. But Hank had other thoughts. He started at a run for the far end away from the center. I followed. What else was there to do? I saw when we got there why he had headed for it. As I said in the beginning, the buildings were constructed like pueblos. We were looking down at a set-back that was only a half-story below us. Hank, being an artist, had formed a picture of what the interior had to be like from what he saw of the exterior. It was a long jump but we didn't hesitate a second. I landed in a heap beside Hank.

Instantly we were up and heading for

the next set-back. We knew the alarm would not be long in sounding.

We made the second; three more to go, I thought, as we raced for the third. This time we didn't quite make it. There were many openings on this level. And as we started for the jump-off place, men began to pour from these openings. We ran like scared rabbits, but they had the speed of deer. There were some twenty or thirty waiting for us at the edge.

We slowed to a walk, then to a stop. As usual their stickers were facing our way.

"SO," LOKO said in wearied tones.

"You are strong men. Prisons do not hold ye. Then we shall have to throw ye into a something which will. I did not want to do what I am going to unless my hand was forced. Ye have forced it. Throw them into the pit. . . ."

There were a heck of a lot more guards this time than before. Our march to this pit Loko spoke of was a regular processional. The whole blamed village turned out to see us, men, women and children. I noticed that the tribe was a tribe of warriors. All, men, women and children, bore arms. They were neither gentle in appearance or manners. We received the physical manifestations of a Bronx cheer in the parade to the pit. I learned there were many strange and ill-smelling vegetables on Pola. Some of the kids threw like a Blackwell and with a bit better aim.

The guards thought it was good fun until several of them got caught in the kisser by some bad throws. Then they shagged the kids. By that time we'd reached the end of the pueblo city. The way led up and down hill for several miles. Toward the end of our journey there were just a few of the villagers left, all women. I got a very strong impression that the women were far more

savage than the men. There was something so frightening in their bright looks, as if they would just as soon have our ends over with on the spot.

We reached our goal at last. I know I breathed a sigh of relief. Whatever we had to face in the pit would not be as frightening as those women. Of course I hadn't seen the pit. I was to learn better.

It was a strange pit. For it was located on a high, or a sort of earthen, tower which stuck up like a lonely finger on the bosom of the plain. A long series of steps wound around the tor to the very top. We were forced to walk ahead, the prodding swords acting as an incentive. At the top we found another series of steps, these leading downward from a platform on the top. I hadn't too much time to observe but in the few seconds I noticed that the top of the tor had been leveled flat so that a great many people could be accommodated on the surface.

As Hank and I wound our way down the face of the tor we noticed that circular opening had been cut into the face of the tor. Our way led evenly between these openings. I became aware of strange odors, bitter-sweet, an acrid stench which turned my stomach the more I got a whiff of them. We could see before we passed them, that these openings had bars before them. Odd muffled sounds were heard. Once we were startled out of our wits by a roaring sound, which, if it did come from an animal, must have been the largest beast in any world. It made a lion's roar sound like Mickey Mouse's squeak.

Going up we were close to the face and going down we were too busy in the descent. But once we reached the bottom and looked upward we saw how far we were from the top. The blasted thing looked miles away. There were fly specks on the platform way up there.

We saw them busying themselves at something. And suddenly there was a vast clattering sound and the stair down which we'd come, reversed itself. One problem was answered. If we *were* to escape, it would not be by way of that winding staircase.

"Shall we dance?" Hank asked.

"Yeah," I said, looking about me. "To the Dance Macabre."

HE SAW what I meant. The floor of the huge circular pit was covered by innumerable stains. One glance was enough to tell us only blood left that particular stain. As if that wasn't enough the whitened bones of hundreds of humans were scattered about. Many a party had been thrown by the lads and lassies of Loko's menage.

"D'ja notice," Hank asked, "that although the sun hasn't stopped shining for a single second we haven't felt any discomfort?"

"What's more peculiar," I reminded him, "is that we have no desire for sleep. I'm speaking for me of course."

"Right. And I'm not hungry either."

"Let's hope the zoo isn't hungry," I said.

"Could be, Berk," he said after a moment's silence, "we won't get out of this spot."

"Speaking of zoos," I said, "wonder how our friend Mokar and his mistress are making out?"

The funniest expression came into Hank's eyes. As though he'd been clipped by a phantom punch. They looked dazed. Words stumbled their way past his lips:

"Yes . . . I bear . . . We will . . . obey. . ."

I got scared and shook the guy. That's all we needed was for Hank to get screwy on me. Things were bad enough. He came out of it okay. In fact he grinned quite like his normal self.

"What happened? Another seance with Luria?" I asked.

"Yes. Come on. We've got to get to the center of the arena. Loko wants us out of the way. His boys will be here soon."

Soon, it turned out, was that very moment. They must have been right on our heels. Suddenly the platform above was black with people. It was impossible to make out the figures of any.

"Yipe!" Hank howled. "Look!"

His quivering finger was pointing up toward the face of the tor. A huge something was clinging to the sheer wall just below one of the openings. Slowly it began to crawl downward. There was something horrible in that sluggishly moving shape. It moved with infinite care yet with a surety that was startling for so large a thing. As it neared the pit we saw it more clearly. I've always wondered what it meant for blood to run cold. I knew then.

It was something from out of a nightmare. To a child versed in the fairy tales it was a dragon. To me, it was a prehistoric beast. It had a great triangular head and a massive body which was scaled from the head to the long tail. Wisps of smoke trailed from its nostrils. I crowded close to Hank as though in mutual protection. And he in turn began a slow retreat to the point farthest from where the beast would land.

God! It must have stretched a good fifty feet. The great head split and from the many-rowed teeth came a terrible stench. A roar split the silence of the pit as it shook its head from side to side. Then it saw us and began a cumbrous movement in our direction. We kept retreating until our backs were against the granite of the wall. It followed relentlessly, surely.

"You run one way," Hank breathed heavily. "I'll run the other."

Perhaps the beast had been used to

easier prey. For as we split up and ran for the opposite wall, it stood still, its head moving from side to side as if in wonderment at our sudden disappearance. When it finally did move it was with express train speed, the murderous tail swishing about in a vicious swing.

ONCE more we faced it together, but this time from the opposite wall. We knew, however, that the respite we had gained was small. No matter how many times we ran from it, we had no place to go except in a circle. And soon or late, we would have to stop from sheer exhaustion. Then . . .

Once more it lumbered toward us. And again we broke for the other wall. We were breathing a bit heavily as we faced the beast again. The faint echo of shrieking voices reached our ears and we involuntarily looked upward. We groaned in unison when we saw the reason for the shouting. They had let another of the horrors at us. We could see the huge body crawling down the granite wall.

"Run, *Berk!*" a voice screamed in my ear.

We had forgotten the beast. As we had looked upward it had moved forward, Hank spotting it first. He leaped to safety, but I wasn't that lucky. The very tip of the tail caught me as I tried to leap to one side and sent me sprawling. I said the beast had the speed of a train when it moved. I was barely on my feet when it was on me.

I had fallen close by a pile of bones. Stooping, I picked a thigh bone from the pile. And swinging it like a bat, I let the thing have it right across its ugly fire-spitting snout. Surely there was no hope or reason for my act. But I wasn't going to go down without at least one blow in my defense, no matter how puny it was.

I could only stare, open-mouthed, as

the beast snorted loudly and retreated from me. With a wild yell spouting from my lips I followed it, belaboring it across the snout with my bone-bat. Hank, seeing what was taking place, came to my assistance. We were laughing, I guess in hysteria, at the way things were going, when it happened. We had forgotten that damned tail.

One sudden swish and we were both knocked from our feet. And this time there were two of them at us. The second had arrived to the festive board. Their mouths were big enough to take us in at a single gulp. I had time for one prayer, as I tried to gain my feet.

I swear their teeth were inches away when that terrific wind came up. My senses started to reel. I couldn't move a muscle, not even an eyelid. There was this wind, and this black cloud that came from nowhere. My ears rang with a shout . . . "*LURIA.*" And blackness enfolded me in a comforting blanket.

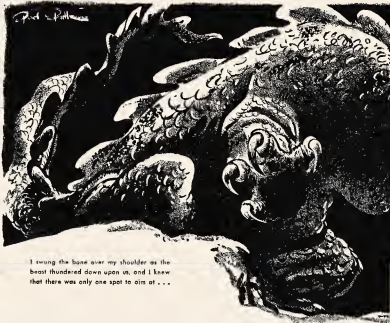
B *ERK! Berk!*"

Wind was sweeping past me in a constant wave. It cooled my sweaty brow. There was a strange up-and-down movement. I opened my eyes—and grabbed tightly at what lay beneath me.

"You okay, kid?" Hank asked.

He was directly ahead of me, in fact so close we were twins on Mokar's back. Hank's right arm was about Luria's waist. She had saved us from the very mouths of our doom. I didn't care how she did it nor was I interested. In fact I didn't have time to worry about the fact that we were riding on the back of a panther. I only knew I was alive. It was enough for me.

But after a few moments of this pounding run I began to sit up and take notice. For one thing, Mokar was running so smoothly, in such marvelous bounds, that the action was slick as oil.



I swung the bane over my shoulder as the beast thundered down upon us, and I knew that there was only one spot to aim at . . .

For another thing the surroundings were exotic in the extreme.

We were in the midst of jungleland. The trees were magnificent in their height and variety. Birds of brilliant-colored plumage sang from bush and branch. The air was invigorating and surprisingly free of humidity. Mokar was sure-footed. His lithe shape never disturbed a single branch as he moved along an invisible trail. Luria sat high up on his body close to the muscled shoulders. She was clothed in the same sort of costume I saw on the warrior women by Loko's side. A slender, needle-tipped spear was couched along one elbow. She looked straight ahead.

The jungle ended abruptly and we entered a grassy plain set in gently roll-

ing hills. Mokar's pace never slackened though our weight must have been considerable even for him. The miles flew by in endless procession. Then with a suddenness that took my breath away, while we were in the midst of what looked like bundles of straw, hundreds of shapes came to life.

The bundles of what I thought had been straw, were humans. And not a single one of them was a man. I didn't hear Luria give voice to any command, yet Mokar slowed his pace and after a very short while stopped running altogether. Luria slid from his back and Hank and I followed, although more gingerly. In an instant we were surrounded by the hundreds of chattering women. They're the same all over, the



instant you give them a chance to yattete, they start full blast.

I'll say this for Luria. She didn't give them too much opportunity to work their jaws on talk. Her arm with the spear held high shot up and silence fell among the warrior-women. As they gathered close I looked them over. There were short ones, tall ones, slim ones and fat ones, beauties and ugly ones, calm ones and those whose eyes looked fierce enough to frighten Boris Karloff. In other words, they looked no different than those on the planet we'd quitted what seemed like years before.

NOT all were giving Luria attention. There were some who stole glances at us. There was one in particular. She

was rather tall, certainly taller than I, whose hair was the color of molten gold, whose eyes were sapphires swimming in a sea of pearl. Her bosom rose high and well-formed in the breastplate she wore. And as she saw my admiring glance her breath quickened and her face flushed. I made a mental note that if the time ever came for talk, I'd forget to.

Luria nodded for us to step to her side. Then, as the others faced us, Luria began to talk:

"These are the ones I promised to bring. The secret my father, the great Oman, taught me has been put to use. But as he warned, I could not bring other than their bodies. More, I could not foresee the place of their arrival.

"So misfortune came to them. One of Loko's bands found them before I could reach them, and brought them before the tyrant. Warriors! Loko threw them into the *pit*. . . ."

A gasp of horror went up at the words.

"Yes," Luria went on. "Into the pit. Strangers on the planet of Pola. Loko violated again the holiest words of my father. Oh, that he were alive. . . ."

"Mighty Oman, may his soul leave the place of its abode and help us," the women intoned solemnly.

Hank and I kept stealing puzzled glances at each other. But our curiosity had to contain itself. We knew that a lot of answers would soon be given.

". . . His thousand years of reign brought Pola a great peace after the tens of thousands of years of wars. Now Loko has it in mind to break that peace. He has even enlisted the aid of *men*. . . ."

This time the women's voices rose in a vast shout of anger. And once more Luria went on:

". . . Aye! Men like Hostal, and Mita and others of his ilk. That was why I went out of our time and place into another. To bring back the sex which once ruled. Our men have grown soft to the ways of war. They have grown soft because the years have made them that way. Look at the weapons of our fighting. Swords, spears and knives. But we are fortunate. Loko and his minions have no choice in this matter. We must prevent Loko and his from gaining the upper hand. Else we all become slaves to his will. . . ."

It was all going in one ear and out the other. But not Hank. He got it right away. I was just in time to see the heat of anger come to his eyes and face, but not in time to stop him. Whirling swiftly, he puled Luria about until she was facing him.

"So that's why you brought me here? As a guinea pig! As a symbol for these Lysistratas of yours. . . ."

Luria didn't take his fingers from her wrist. Instead, she motioned for the other dames to halt; at the very touch of Hank's fingers, swords flashed in the bright sunlight and bodies tensed.

"Did you think it was because of your manly beauty?" she asked. "Or because of your charm?"

Hank's fingers fell away from her wrist. The flush of anger still lighted his lean long face. But there was a tinge of frustration in his eyes. Perhaps he *had* assumed it *might* have been because of some such reasons.

"I brought you here, you and this ugly wart of a man whom you call friend, because you were the vessel in which the fluid of my father's wisdom coagulated. Only you heard the call. And because this Berk was your friend did I allow him with you. . . ."

"Okay, babe," Hank said evenly. "You called, we answered. Now I don't like the set-up. So suppose you send us right back to the place you got us from."

"You pout prettily," Luria said. "How like must this Earth be to our planet. Here, too, the men pout if we do not give them their way."

I DAMNED her and could have kicked Hank. He kept opening his yap and she kept putting her foot in it.

"Yes," I said. "We have all the manners of men. But I gather you are not too well-acquainted with *all* the ways. Perhaps it's in the cards that you're going to learn."

"Aah! He gives a twist to words and has no fear that they will rebound to confound him," Luria said, turning her attention to me.

I didn't care. There wasn't a dame alive on this or any planet I couldn't

argue with or against.

"Yep. I have no fear. Only in your tears do you have immunity. . . ."

"Tears! Do you take me for a man?"

I gave her a slow up-and-down. This time it was she who burned bright red. I knew my look was an insult. I'd already figured the score. If we were playing Lysistrata then the boy friends and husbands of these Amazons were weak-kneed neutrals.

"Not the way you stack up, kid," I said.

I guess it was insult direct. Only the answer to it came from an unexpected corner. My head rocked from a blow and I staggered a bit before I recovered my balance. When my head cleared I saw it was the luscious dish whom I'd been admiring who stood facing me.

"It is not meet that our leader, whose toes you are too low to touch, should deal you the punishment you deserve. But I, who am the smallest of her servants, can. . . ."

These babes sure could yell. All they needed was one of their number to open up and they were ready with the howling. I looked at Luria who had a half-grin on her lips.

"Teach the little toad a lesson," Luria said.

"Hey!" I called in protest as an immense circle formed about us. "I can't hit a woman."

And once more my head rocked as she planted one right on the jawbone. Well, woman or no, she wasn't playing for fun. I stepped back, danced around a bit to loosen up my leg muscles, put up my dukes and, *whammm!* Something hit me with the force of a mule's kick.

"Berk," a voice called from a long distance off. "Get up. Don't let her look like a champ. . . ."

There were ten suns up there, and a million women at least. Then my head cleared and there was that beautiful pan

looking down at me. I motioned for her to step back and got to my feet.

"Okay, kiddo," I said, snuffing the claret back up my nostrils. "You asked for it. Come and get it."

Then bing, bing, bing, faster than the telling takes, she let me have it.

Gosh, I thought. They got the sweetest-singing birds out here. And angels, too. My, what a place. Just like heaven. And once more that voice called me. I was beginning to dislike Mister Sharpe. Why didn't he take a couple of lumps? Was I supposed to take them all?

The birds I thought I heard was the strident sound of all those bags yelling, and the angels' faces were not so angelic, once my vision cleared. My knees were on the wobbly side. My glamour-puss could hit like Louis. I assayed a grin but yipped in pain instead.

"Enough?" the dear girl asked.

I SHOOK my head. I'm a stubborn dope in some ways. But the memory of the giant who'd taken his picks on me had come to mind and suddenly I wanted to haul off at something.

I motioned her forward with beckoning fingers. This time I got there *fast*. Instead of hitting with my right, I closed the beckoning fingers of my left hand and jabbed her right on the point of her stubborn chin. Her head went back and my right came over, but with all I had on it. There was a sharp *crack!* And baby went sailing through the air to land on a pillow of grass some fifteen feet from where we were battling.

They proved they were the opposite sex, then. Their voices rose like banshees on the prowl and with a single concerted bowl they made for me. Nor were they joking. They had those three-foot long stickers out and aimed right for Hank and myself. Again Luria stopped them:

"Halt! Are we men that we attack like animals? Besides, Lovah has not signified defeat."

I cursed the day I'd ever seen this woman, the day I'd ever met Henry Sharpe, and most of all the day I went to the zoo with him. Now I *was* on a spot. This Lovah could just be that stubborn as not to give up easily.

Several of the gals had gone to Lovah's assistance. The kid was on the wobbly side as they brought her forward. My punch had raised a lump on the side of her jaw. And her eyes didn't quite have that superior look as she tried to look into mine.

"Better take it easy, kid," I said, picking my words carefully. "There's no sense in beating each other silly. You're far too pretty to get messed up. . . ."

I guess it was the first time anyone had called her pretty. Though why not was a mystery to me. She could make my breakfast any morning of the week.

Her left hand came up and caressed the swelling and her eyes became a lot more natural, and something of speculation showed in the deep blue. I held my breath, waiting for her answer. I blew it out in a deep sigh when she said:

"Enough . . . for the while," Lovah said.

Only Luria was smart enough to get the game I'd played.

"You *are* clever with words," she said, and this time there was no scorn in her voice. "Well, call your mounts. Enough time has been wasted. . . ."

It was a command which was instantly obeyed. A tuneless whistling went up and like black demons called from their pits, hundreds of black panthers, much like Mocar in appearance, though none so large, rose, as though from the very ground. They loped forward and the women mounted them.

Lovah gestured for me to step to her side. I did and she motioned for me to mount behind her. Then at a signal from Luria, who had again taken Hank behind her, we were off.

"Say, beautiful," I said as we started, "you got a wallop. What's more you got a whole lot more that appeals to me. . . ."

She turned and looked deeply into my eyes. Her face became oddly soft, then, with the speed of light, it changed and as she drove her elbow into my belly, knocking the wind from me, she said:

"You got a wallop, too. . . ."

AT FIRST I thought it was suburbia. At least a real-estate agent's dream development. They called it Gayno, but it could have been the community of El Rancho Grande, for all of me. It was a community of well-laid-out homes, all single-storied, with the most modern architectural designs; sloping roofs, glass walls, patios and terraces to take advantage of shade and sun gave it the House Beautiful look.

When we were still several hundred yards from the village of homes the women lifted their voices in a sort of musical chant. It was the first I knew their voices could be soft and charmingly feminine. Then as we swept into the level grass-filled width of street a host of men and children came from the houses and followed us to one set apart from the rest. Luria, in the lead, drew Mocar up to the shallow series of steps leading to the door of the house, and dismounted. Lovah kicked her panther beside Mocar and with a well-placed blow of her elbow, knocked me from the animal. As she wheeled him around, she turned her face to me and winked broadly.

I sighed deeply and got to my feet and walked to the side of Hank and the

girl. I had an idea that this Lovah baby wasn't too displeased with me.

"Well, come in," Luria said.

The other women scattered as we followed the girl into the house. If I thought the exteriors of the homes looked like something out of House Beautiful, the interiors took my breath away. Wow! Two-level interiors with an incline leading to a combination dining and living room on the second story. The first floor had four walls of colored glass which softened the sun's rays and gave them a subdued and marvelous brilliance which somehow did not hurt the eyes. There was a wondrous air of peace and serenity in this house.

Luria slumped wearily into a deep-piled chair after throwing off her belt and helmet. There were a couple of sofas facing each other across a gigantic coffee table. Hank and I sat side by side on one, so that we were in profile to the girl. To our left was a raised fireplace of colored stones. Above it, on the mantle, were some statuary, primitives, from the looks of them. At sight of them, Hank arose and examined them closely.

"Say! These are truly wonderful. Who was the carver?"

"One of my servants," Luria said in answer. But her mind was elsewhere. She shook her head after a second or so, looked up to Hank and said, "Care for a beverage?"

"Sure," I said. "Make mine Scotch and water."

Hank was still deep in study of the small statue. He turned and said:

"Servant? Why that's criminal! Someone with a positive talent for creative work, someone with the ability of this person whoever he may be, should certainly not be a *servant*!"

"Sit down," Luria said. It wasn't said in anger but rather in an almost supplicating tone.

HANK sat deep in a corner of the wide sofa. To my surprise she walked around the arm of the sofa, past the coffee table and faced us. She studied us for a second, then spoke:

"You are strangers here, in a strange land, among strange people who have strange customs. I don't have any doubts but that you will both have to spend the rest of your natural lives here. My father discovered the secret of transmigration of bodies. But it is still a mystery to me how he returned them.

"Therefore I beg of both of you to take what I have to say to heart. There should be a beginning, I know. But that beginning goes back into an antiquity greater and more distant than any you know. I saw a something in your eyes the instant you entered my home. I think I interpreted it correctly. You both marveled that you should find something approximating your own civilized world, after a visit to the world of Loko.

"Then let me start from there. For it is in that you might best understand. Here, you have a ready comparison. This land of Gayno and Loko's world. Further, when my father lived, there were better worlds, finer cities, greater cultures. But death came to him as it must come to all and though he lived to be eleven hundred and sixty-four years. . . ."

I couldn't help it. Eleven hundred and sixty-four years! I grunted an unintelligible something. She caught on fast.

"Unbelievable, isn't it? That one can live so many years?" she asked.

Hank got the connotation of her remark before I did. He squinted at her and said:

"And I suppose you're in your . . .?"

"I am nine hundred and twenty-four years old," she said.

"Pretty well-preserved for your age, I'd say," I said.

"Lovah is almost a thousand years old," she said.

I thought that was nasty of her. But it was like a woman. I grinned weakly. "Touché," I said.

"Let's get back to your father," Hank suggested.

"Very well," she replied. "In the last forty years of my father's reign, a small border clash became a conflagration which set all of Pola aflame. He did not know it at the time, but there were some who were envious of his power. They plotted his downfall and overcame his legions. It turned into a war of utter annihilation. When it was over, there was nothing left of culture, civilization, or people. Here and there were scattered the fragments of humanity.

"They went back to living as they had done thousands of years ago. They had to do this because my father in his great wisdom, realizing the finality of the battle, doomed the terror weapons of the time and erased their marks forever. We, the offspring of that terrible time, had only the means you see of waging war, a sword, a spear and a knife.

"So we had to make the best of things. For my people I chose the standard of living which best suited our time. I utilized the forms of home architecture which because of the constant sunlight would be most suitable. But, as I said before, we were scattered over the entire face of Pola. Loko, who was the ringleader and the only one of the Inner Council to survive the war, went back even further in antiquity for the plans of his community. But he wasn't interested in how his people lived. He still had it in mind and to this day is obsessed, by his overweening desire to be the ruler of the planet of Pola. . . ."

SHE paused for a breath. And in that moment I thought, baby, you got a right to tell some one else they're clever with words. You don't have to take a back seat to anybody when it comes to making with the lip.

"Aside from the physical manifestations of what transpired with Berk and myself," Hank spoke up like a good scientist, "there are certain questions which are bothering me. I would appreciate it very much if an answer were forthcoming.

"Now then, I believe I am assuming correctly, when I say that Pola and the planet from which we have come are existing in the same spheres of time and place . . .?"

Oh boy, I thought. Good old Sharpe! Now he's going to make like he knows what he's talking about. Of course Hank always had a sharp mind, if I'm allowed a pun. He was proving it now.

Luria answered the question in the seconds I was in thought:

"That is right."

"Well," Hank said in a speculative tone, "that proved a theory which some men have always held. Now another question. How is it you speak, in fact all the people we have met speak, our tongue, English?"

Luria smiled and arose and walked to a near wall. A heavy ribbon-like cord hung against the wall. She puled at it and from somewhere in the house a bell sounded in answer to the bell-pull. She came back to the sofa and snuggled up in a corner.

"The tongue we speak is universal on Pola," she said. The instant you landed you too, spoke our tongue."

It wasn't a satisfactory answer but I supposed it had to do. Hank wasn't through, however.

"That doesn't make sense. Try this; what is the Groana bird and why is it holy?"

We had to wait for the answer to that. A husky, masculine voice said:

"Greatness . . . You rang?"

We turned and there was a man who wearing a sort of lavalava for a costume. His hairy chest was bare as were his legs. Muscles rippled along the shoulders and arms and as he bent his legs knotted with muscles. He was close to six feet in height.

"Yes, Hioa," Luria said. "My guests are thirsty. . . ."

He shook his head and as silently as he had come, left.

"All your men, servants?" Hank asked.

She nodded. "If not so in fact, in theory," she replied.

"A nation of women," I said. "All wrong."

"By Earthly standards," she said turning to me. "But as I said in the beginning you must understand our customs *are* not as yours. Here, the women are the rulers. Men have only a minor part in the business of state."

I was tempted to ask something but I didn't think it to be the time.

". . . Only Loko has changed those conditions of servitude," Luria went on. "Since the dawn of the new era, women took over the duties which men served so dishonorably before. All went well until Loko thought the time ripe. Secretly, he trained his minions in the arts of war, and when he thought the time was ripe, began his campaign. He has a clever tongue. Not only did he manage to train the men of his tribe but he also convinced the warrior women of the Federation it was only for the purpose of waging war upon me that he did so. And that when he had defeated me he would relegate them to their former positions."

"And the Groana Bird?" Hank asked again.

"The Groana Bird is the symbol by

which we will conquer," Luria said. "It is the most ancient of all living beings on Pola. It holds the secret of all things. It means success or failure. Once it sat on my father's right hand. Now it roams free and unfettered in the forest. We all seek it. And find it I must even if I have to go into the valley of the mists. . . ."

MY EARS pricked up at the sound of a screaming voice. I thought I was mistaken, but the voice sounded masculine. The screaming came closer. Then another voice joined it, this one raised in anger, and this one decidedly feminine. Hank and the girl heard the sounds also. An expression of displeasure crossed her face. She rose and started down the ramp. Hank and I followed.

We arrived at the front door simultaneously, Luria, Hank, I and the two who were screaming. Luria flung the door wide and a giant of a man sprawled to his knees before her. Behind him, some few feet came a short scrawny woman who held in one hand a thick club.

"Ohh, Greatness . . ." the character on his knees babbled. "Save me from Haavah. Save me. . . ."

The women skidded to halt before us. The sounds of the screaming had brought others to their doors. I could see children huddled close to their father's knees. From the houses closest to ours, several women strolled over in curiosity. But at sight of the guy on his knees before us and the scrawny babe who was standing with the club hanging limply from one hand, smiles broke on their lips. It was evident this story was not new to them.

"Now what is it, Jimno?" Luria asked in disgust.

"Haavah," the man babbled in a bass voice which Ezio Pinza would have been proud to possess, "she beats me. . . . I

swear I have done nothing to deserve the beatings. . . ."

"He lies, the idiot," the woman said. "In his teeth. Ten years we have been together. A simple thing like soup, and he burns it. It has become unbearable. I awake and it takes him a lifetime to make breakfast. Our children are the worst-dressed in the whole village. All he wants to do is sing. . . ."

"Now ain't that too bad?" I said before Luria could say anything. "All he wants to do is sing, eh? Well, maybe we shouldn't waste sympathy on him. After all, he's so big and you're so small. I'm sure if he ever decided to give you your lumps, you'd be in bed for a week. Of course, he might have a bit of peace. . . ."

"Quiet," Luria spat at me in anger. "I give the orders and dispense the justice in these cases."

"Sure," Hank said. "Close your trap. If we ever tell these characters that they're living in a fool's paradise they'll tear these women limb from limb. . . ."

I swear that beautiful face turned livid in anger. She turned on Hank and slapped him right across the cheek. He went pale in anger and I saw his hands clench into bony fists. For the barest second I thought he was going to haul off and slug her. How he held back from doing it I don't know. I'm sure I couldn't have. Instead, he turned on his heels and went back into the house. It was a mistake. Because I observed that the guy on his knees had been watching. There was a bright light in his eyes when Hank talked up like he did. But when Hank did the disappearing act, the light died.

The anger in Luria's face went into her voice:

"Haavah! We are becoming weary of this constant strife between you and Jimno. If it is true what you say and that you are as tired of it as you say,

then haul him up before the bar of justice and have them sentence Jimno to the breaking of paarans to the halter. . . ."

A CHANGE came over the woman's face at Luria's words. It reflected fear and horror now.

"Great Luria," the woman bleated. "Not that."

"And why not?" Luria asked. "He is of little use to you. Further he causes nothing but trouble. He sings when he should be doing the housework, he burns the soup, lets the children run ragged and uncared for, is lazy and a dozen other things. You will be better rid of him. . . ."

"And he of her," I put in.

"But . . . the paavans. They have killed some who have tried to break them to the halter. . . ."

"So he'll have a chance to prove he's either man or mouse," I said. "Certainly he's big enough as a man. H'm. If I had you for a wife, I'd know who'd do the housework and care for the kids. We teach women differently on Earth. . . ."

"How is it done on Earth?" the man asked suddenly. He was still on his knees but his body was erect. And he was looking straight at me. So stunned were the two women by Jimno's temerity in speaking to me without asking their permission, they could only stare.

"She'd fit just right over your knee," I said quickly. "A couple of smacks with one of those palms and she'd behave, believe me. . . ."

"Quiet, you!" Luria stormed.

But Haavah wielded a more efficient means of silence. She raised her club and clouted Jimno across the back of the head. A ripple of laughter ran across the narrow circle which had formed about the woman and her husband, as the man folded up in middle and sank face downward to the ground.

"Take him away," Luria said. To the paavans' compound. Let him break six of the beasts to the halter."

Suddenly I felt sick. Me and my big mouth. What had I done? Maybe I had sentenced a man to death? Anger whipped my voice to a frenzied shout:

"So this is the stuff from which you want us to weld a fighting force? And how do you expect us to work it, by the women whipping their men to us?"

From the corner of my eye I saw the man stir, shake his head and slowly get to his feet. Only I got the air of ominous quiet with which he moved. The rest watched him arise and an air of watchful waiting settled among the women. Dimly I felt someone standing by the door behind us. At the same time I realized that other doorways hid other watchers.

The woman, called Haavah, waited only until Jimno stood erect. Then with a movement that was altogether at variance with her scrawny self, she leaped forward and swung the club at the same time.

Man oh man, if I had ever been slugged like that I know I'd never have been able to duck that club. But he did. Then like a boxer who'd been hit hard and wanted to weather the storm, he ducked and weaved under and past the swinging club. The women thought the whole thing the funniest thing they'd ever seen. They laughed as the poor guy ducked, and once or twice they literally screamed in hysteria as the club barely missed the curly black hair.

When he did move it was with the speed of a striking snake. One second he was under the club, the next his fingers had wrapped themselves around it. With one twist it was pulled from her. He chuckled deep in his throat as he tossed it to one side. He motioned her forward. She didn't come so he stepped toward her. I yelled a warning

as her hand sped to her belt. But he was speed personified as his hand beat hers to it. He twisted with an effortless movement of his wrist and her hand fell from the belt.

It was his free hand which went toward the belt now. I saw a dozen hands go for weapons as his fingers went about the circle of leather. He yanked downward and the leather parted. This too he tossed to one side. All the while his right hand held her wrist prisoner.

"Ten years, Haavah," his voice lifted in a singing shout. "Ten years. . ."

I'LL SAY this. Her face showed not the smallest sign of fear as he whirled her so that her back was to him. Then he had lifted her from her feet and dropping to one knee he laid her across that knee. She squirmed like a fish in a net and like that same fish found all her squirming without avail. His hand lifted and fell, palm downward. It lifted and fell. At first there was no sound but the heavy breathing of the two. But after the tenth whack on the woman's posterior, a whimper fled her lips. The whimper became a moan which later became a sobbing sound. It was strange but not a woman stirred or spoke while he was administering the spanking. Nor did any lift a voice when he was done and said:

"Go, woman, and prepare me food. . ."

Jimno stood tall and proud and faced his queen.

"The sentence still stands, Jimno," she said. "Haavah will cook and keep *your* house afterward. Beating her proves nothing."

"It proves he is a man," I said.

"Not by your standards. My women and I too, have broken the paavans to the halter. Let him go and try to do it. Then we can talk of manhood. . ."

"What is a paavan?" I asked.

"Mokar is a paavan. . . ."

I turned and without a word went back into the house. I saw a shape slide into a passageway. I only got a glimpse of the figure. It was that of a man and the man was Hioa.

Hank was deep in the sofa, cuddled up against one arm. He didn't hear me come in what with the depth of the carpet and for another thing he was deep in thought. I slid into the opposite chair and waited for him to come out of his brown study.

His eyes were bleak and bitter when he finally did turn. "Nice going, Sharpe," he said aloud. But he wasn't talking to me. He was talking to himself. "Now you can join the rest of the eunuchs. . . ."

"Aah, cut it out," I said in disgust. "What the heck makes you that way. The gal's nuts about you."

"Sure. Just like that scrawny dame was about her man. Luria's probably been figuring in what womanly capacity I'd do best. Well, if she thinks I'm going to cook or scrub floors. . . ."

I knew there was *one* way of breaking Hank from his thoughts. He wasn't the kind of guy who looked good playing cry-baby. For one thing he was too big a man and I don't mean in size. But we had undergone a very strange and mystifying ordeal. Not that I'm such a big Joe about something like that. It's just that I'm thicker-skinned. Besides, I had some long range plans, most of which had to do with a Lovah gal. . . . So I gave him the business about my troubles:

". . . You got worries," I broke in. "Your worries I should have. . . ."

"What do you mean?"

"I just sentenced a guy to maybe his death."

"Huh?"

"Sure. I made with a yuck and those

screwy dames, or rather, *that* screwy dame, Luria, sentenced the poor Joe to break Mokar's buddies to the halter."

"She would," Hank said sourly.

"Yeah. And after he gave that silly frau of his a good tanning," I said.

"You mean the guy stood up for his rights?"

"That he did."

"H'm. Then maybe all hope is not lost. Where's Luria?"

"Don't ask me. I had to walk away from it all."

"What do *you* want?" her voice asked from the direction of the ramp.

"One thing only, my pet," Hank said. "What is it you want of us exactly?"

"Just one thing. Teach my menfolk how to battle."

"Okay. But first teach your menfolk how to be men," Hank said.

And that was that for the evening or morning or whatever time it was in that land of eternal sun. . . .

THERE were twin beds in the sleeping rooms Luria had given us. Hank and I slept in our undies. When we awoke we awoke to find the rest of our garments gone. In their places were breastplates and helmets such as Captain Mita and the other men in Loko's world, wore. We even had the long and short stickers to go in the belt that came with the metal apron that went over the short pants.

"She doesn't miss a trick," Hank said wearily as he stepped into the modern bathroom adjoining our bedroom. I heard the splashing sound of water but I was too engrossed in putting on the uniform which had been provided for me. Nor was it a bad fit. The only thing large was the breastplate. Of course I realized after a try-on, they weren't meant for a man.

The bathroom had everything but razors. My beard which is of a dark

texture anyway hadn't known a blade's touch for several days, in fact from the looks of it, for a week. I remembered then that the few men I'd seen were either smooth-shaven or were hairless on the face. Hank gave a last sputter and stepped up from the sunken shower. He was rubbing himself with a fuzzy towel.

"Ain't none. I looked. Guess no one shaves out here. How do they fit?"

I did a double-take at the words, then grinned at him. He had guessed at my tardiness. I told him and he answered my grin.

"Oh, well. Go on, take your shower. I'll see you later."

He wasn't in the room when I came back. Neither was his war garb. I donned mine and stepped out into the passage leading to the ramp. Here the bedrooms were on the lower floor. The two of them were already eating when I arrived. Hank gave me an okay sign with his thumb and index fingers, but the girl didn't even look up. We ate in silence.

"Well," she said after a last drink of something that looked like coffee but tasted like something else only better, "now that we're awake, suppose we get started?"

"You bet," I said, "and what does your *greatness* want us to do?"

"... When we get there," she threw over her shoulder as she started for the door.

I gulped audibly when I saw what was awaiting us. Mokar and two of his brothers. Luria mounted her beast and looked to us. Hank and I did an Alphonse-Gaston act for a couple of seconds, then with ill-concealed reluctance, stepped to the sides of our mounts. Those darned animals must have sensed our fear. As I started to lift my leg he turned his head and showed me his fangs.

They were very pretty. I wondered who his dentist was, as I shied, but fast, from the spot I was in. Hank, on the other hand, had a lot more guts than I wanted to have. When his mount tried to pull a similar stunt, Hank cracked him over the nose. The beast's head came up and sideways. Hank slapped him again and jerked at the halter. Instantly the panther obeyed. Then Hank slid in the saddle.

And that left me on the ground.

"Oh, come now, nimble-tongue," Luria needled me. "We can't spend all day here."

"We can't?" I parried beautifully.

She looked past me and I turned to follow her glance. Directly behind us were a dozen of the biggest women I've ever seen. Not a single one was under six feet in height. And all were armed. As though in answer to a signal, one of them jabbed at me with one of those ten feet-long spears they carried. It barely touched me, but that tip had a needle for a point. I yipped in pain and alarm. Then with a single leap I was in the shallow saddle. Teeth or no teeth, that spear was sharper.

We hadn't far to go. And after a while I got to rather like the ride. Those panthers ran like the wind and the movement didn't have the up-and-down feeling of a horseback ride. Our destination was a valley. The valley was natural but it had been fenced in by a staked fence. There was a gate at the end we had arrived at. One of the warrior women dismounted and opened it. We rode in and found ourselves on a wide ledge overlooking the sheer drop to the almost circular valley below.

I LOOKED about and saw that a long series of steps had been cut into the stone. Below us something was taking place which caught and held my attention. At the far end of the valley



Jimno stood for a moment, the brodie and hatter in his hands, watching as the cat snarled its contempt at him—that slowly he started to walk toward the panther

I made out the shapes of four panthers. Coming toward them were a dozen women. These women were armed with spears. Behind them, unarmed, walked Jimno. We could hear the women crying to the panthers, telling them to take it easy. The animals suddenly broke and raced around the valley floor. Not all of them I saw after a second. One of them had been cornered. And for the first time I saw what Jimno carried in his arms, a bridle and halter.

I gasped when I realized what he was going to do, place them about the panther's throat. I watched breathlessly his approach. The only thing the women did were hold the panther at bay with their spears. Jimno had to do the dirty work. And it was more than just dirty. It was dangerous. The beast snarled and showed its teeth. But I'll say this for the man. He walked in like it was a big tabby he was going to pet.

Suddenly there was a swirl of motion.



A small cloud of dust arose. When it cleared we saw that Jimno had succeeded in placing the halter where it belonged. But his task was half-done. Now he had to ride the panther. Like a centaur, Jimno leaped onto the animal's back, kicked him in the ribs and began to work the reins. The animal snarled, turned his head to get at the man's feet but was only rewarded by slaps across its nostrils and kicks in the ribs. I was reminded of a cowboy breaking in a

bronc. And to carry the simile further, Jimno rode the panther back and forth across the floor of the valley until the panther obeyed the slightest touch of the reins and of the feet.

The second and third beasts broke in as easily as the first. The fourth was another story. It was easily the largest of the four animals, even larger, I think than Mokar. It slapped the spears, once knocking down the woman who held one of them. If the others hadn't rushed to

her defense he would have torn her limb from limb.

"Jimno had better be careful with this one," Luria said. "He shows a wild spirit."

Jimno must have realized it also. His steps were far more careful. He walked daintily as though on eggs. The circle of spears opened to let him through. Sensing the helplessness of the man, the beast whirled to face him. Someone nearby was breathing in harsh, throaty gasps. It was me. . . .

Down below the drama was becoming more tense. Jimno moved forward slowly, carefully. The beast retreated until at last its back was against the wall. Then Jimno did something strange. He paused when only a few feet from the panther, shook his head and dropped the gear he was carrying. He paused there erect and unafraid, then stepped forward. Instantly, as though the beast had been awaiting Jimno's action, he reared upward its front legs with those terrible claws open. And Jimno walked straight forward into the embrace.

I tried to yell, tried to get something past the sandpaper which had suddenly lined my throat, but nothing came out. Even in the midst of terror, in circumstances which seem to hold one's entire attention, there is part of one that is separate from the rest. So it was I somehow saw Hank's and the girl's reaction to what was going on below.

Hank's face was rigid, livid with the tense expectation of what was sure to happen to Jimno, and horror-stricken that he couldn't help. Luria too showed emotion. Her's rather was like a surgeon in an operating amphitheatre, watching a fellow surgeon at work.

Below, Jimno walked into the panther's embrace. But not to his death, as we were imagining. I don't know how he did it, but suddenly Jimno ducked. He must have ducked a split second be-

fore the beast slashed at him. But Jimno ducked the blow. And like light Jimno used both hands to grasp the panther by the fur at the shoulder. Then setting his feet hard in the earth Jimno swung the panther about and leaped on its back.

I COULDN'T help letting out a wild yell of delight. Nor was Hank far behind me with his cheer. Even Luria's eyes shone in admiration. For Jimno now had the panther at a disadvantage. He was on the beast's back, his fingers deep in the fur, his legs wound around the beast's belly. Jimno's right hand came up and delivered a terrific slap across the panther's face. The beast reared his fore claws and legs trying to swipe in futile swings at the man on its back. The more the beast clawed the harder Jimno slapped. At last Jimno won out. With a last vicious blow, Jimno slid from the panther's back and walked nonchalantly to where the women were standing.

He walked with his shoulders square and his back straight and when he came into their midst he didn't walk around them but moved as though they had better give him room, else he'd walk right over them. They moved out of his way all right.

He marched up the long flight of stairs, saw us, and came forward to stand before Luria.

"Greatness," he said, "the deed to which I was sentenced has been done. . . ."

"And well-done," Luria said graciously. "Truly, you are a man, one worthy of carrying arms. Jimno, tell me. Would you care to be the first of the legions of men I am going to recruit?"

"I would be honored."

"Good. In the future you and Haavah will share equally the burdens and joys

of your lives. If she lays a hand to you, you have my express authority to strike back. . . ."

I realized I was hearing history being made. These men, though not eunuchs, performed the same functions.

" . . . So be it with you Jimno, and all men. Hear me, my lieutenants. From this day henceforth, all men share and share alike, the burdens and joys of women. On our return spread the news to the entire community. Go. You, Hank and Berk, stay with me. I have things to tell. . . ."

She waited until the others had left, then dismounted from Mokar and walked to the lip of the valley and sat on a grassy hummock. Hank and I followed and sat beside her.

" . . . I was awake all night," she said. "Sleep would not come to me. My mind kept turning over and over again on the dilemma we are in. It is not an easy thing to admit defeat before it comes. Yet defeat is undeniable."

"Why?" Hank asked.

She tossed her head and her hair shook free in gleaming waves about her face.

"We are too few. Loko has not alone the majority of the tribes but the very ones who have kept up a semblance of the war-like proclivities of their predecessors. We are their superiors in spirit, but in war, spirit alone is not enough."

"So?" Hank was doing one of those single-syllable deals with her. I knew it was irritating her because it was irritating me. Of course I knew the reason for it. She didn't.

"I have tride to find a way out but the only one I can think of is to go to Loko and acknowledge his claim and throw myself on his mercy."

"If that's the way you feel . . ." Hank said.

I bid a grin in my palm. She was getting a little flushed in her cheeks. Spots

of color burned below her eyes and her eyes were beginning to flash in anger. Her right hand, lying on the grass close to me clenched in a small and capable fist.

"Okay then," Hank said. "Since that is the way you feel send us back."

Her hand came down in a slap at the earth. Her lips set firm and hard against each other.

"Very well," she said. "I won't hold you here against your wishes. As soon as we get back. . . ."

WE SAW the smudge of smoke lying low on the horizon when we were barely past the first hill. Luria's eyes widened at the odd sight, then narrowed in sudden understanding. I guess I was the last to catch on and so was the last to urge my beast to greater speed. I don't think we were very far from Gayno when we saw a horde of humans and animals coming toward us. In the lead, mounted on a magnificent panther, was Jimno.

We drew rein and waited for the arrival of the first of the mob. Jimno leaped from the back of his mount, dashed over to us and stood silent, his great chest heaving in panting breath. We saw then that he had suffered a number of wounds, one of them a wide slash from a sharp instrument, that had cut through the surface flesh all the way across the chest. Blood dripped from the wound, but Jimno seemed completely unaware of it.

" . . . Loko," he gasped after a second. He turned as the first of the hundreds of men, women and children streamed up, then brought his attention back to us. "Loko's minions attacked. While we were in the valley of the paavans. It was a surprise. And before a defense could be organized, they had set fire to the whole of the city. They were too many and the surprise was too great.

Many perished. These are all who were left. I organized the retreat. . . ."

They were a pitiful few, I saw, that had made good their escape. My eyes gladdened when I saw that the girl, Lovah, was among them. I've got to hand it to Luria. No fumbling, no fear, no hesitation.

"Then they will surely follow; perhaps they are not too far off. To the caves. Jimno, you, Lovah and Berk, take twenty warriors and cover the rear. I'll take the others. . . ."

"So get moving, stupe," Hank yelled.

I held both hands out empty to show why I wasn't going anywhere. Immediately someone thrust a sword into one hand and a spear into the other, and to make matters completely at a loss for me Hank kicked my mount in the rump and Lovah, Jimno, and I were off to glory.

Into the valley of death rode the twenty-three, I thought, as we headed back. Lovah reined her panther to my side.

"Remember one thing," she said as we rode, "your paavan is faster in every way than the okas they ride. It is our real advantage over them. You are riding, Lipso, a well-trained animal. I know because I trained him. Give him the reins if we meet danger. And stay close to, my man, because this will not be a contest of fists."

Lipso was well-trained because when I leaned over and put my arms about Lovah's waist and drew her close, he didn't move an inch or slack his pace. I kissed her hard, perhaps not as satisfyingly as I wanted, but for the condition, well enough. I guessed it was the first time she'd ever been kissed because she brought one hand to her mouth in wonder. The most beautiful smile I'd ever seen came to life on those wonderful lips and before I knew what she was intending, she had reached in my direction,

hauled me to her and gave me a kiss in return. Years went by before I came out of the halo-like daze I was in. From then on love was the last thing on my mind.

The dirty dogs had set the whole place on fire. Not only that but there were some who were still alive in the inferno. We could hear the screams of the poor devils. Jimno took the lead as though he was born to it.

HIS hand shot up and we rode up until we were a narrow circle about him. He gestured with his hand toward a stretch of trail which would lead us between the usual lush jungle growth with which I was now familiar.

"It seems," Jimno said in a growling voice, "that they are too intent on loot, pillage and worse, to pursue. Or perhaps they think we will wait their coming on bended knees. But soon they will think of those who escaped. Then will they ride after. There is no trail other than through there. . . ."

Again I looked to the dense brush and narrow trail and immediately a picture formed in mind of what could happen were we to lay a trap.

". . . We are few but enough for what we can do. To face them squarely would be suicidal. Rather let us pair off and infiltrate through the brush but not too far off the trail. Our paavans move like shadows between the narrowest part of the forest. Their clumsier and slower beasts cannot follow. Therefore let us make haste and make rendezvous with them as they enter and harry them until they reach the open spaces. Then, when we have done with them here, let us ride ahead and make sure we meet them again later, where the forest meets the hills. . . ."

The women wore broad smiles long before he had finished. They needed nothing further in the way of command or instruction. Like shadows, they melt-

ed into the greyness which bordered the lush growth. In a few seconds it seemed as though there had never been human or beast on the trail. Jimno, one of the women warriors, Lovah and myself, were the last to lose ourselves.

"Give Lipso his head," Lovah said as she moved forward. "He has been trained to follow. . . ."

We wound about, our beasts moving in complete silence, over fallen logs, between the boles of jungle-giants which pressed so closely together that it seemed impossible anything other than a snake could maneuver his way through. Yet the lithe black bodies managed with an ease which astounded me. Deeper and further into the gloomy green we went. As though aware of the impending clash, the forest life was stilled, not even the birds trilling their songs.

Lipso and Lovah's mount moved tail to snout, so close were they. I watched the lithe form of the woman ahead. Suddenly her hand went to the scabbard and the long sword came into the open. I followed suit. I could see nothing. There *was* nothing to be seen. The jungle looked as impenetrable as ever. The sun never existed as far as I was concerned. We moved in an odorous and silent world. Then Lipso stopped and I became aware that Lovah was sitting erect and expectant.

From somewhere ahead there came a grunting and squealing. The sound of men's voices lifted in rough talk also came to our ears, but so dimly I couldn't make out the words. My throat tightened so that my breath came out in a wheeze when I realized that the moment was at hand for our ambush. There was but a single question in my mind. How were we going to go about it?

Lovah answered that question.

Her fingers pulled lightly on the reins and before my startled eyes her mount

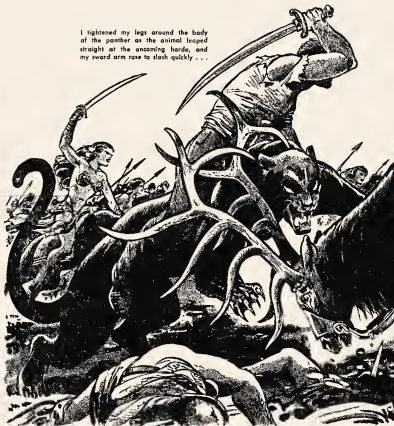
leaped nimbly up the huge bole of a nearby tree. Immediately, Lipso followed. I clung tightly with both hands about the panther's neck. Worse was to follow. The animals moved gingerly out on a limb, mine a little below and to the left of Lovah's. We perched thus for the space of perhaps thirty seconds. I saw that we were almost directly above the narrow, twisting trail. The grunting sounds of the animals and the guttural sounds of their riders came more distinctly to my ears.

They were telling each other, with a horrible relish, of what they had done, while the houses burned. . . .

A PECULIAR series of tuneless whistles broke from the midst of the forest about us and simultaneously with those sounds the *how* of the ambush was made clear to me. I saw Lovah's thighs contract and grip close to the lean sides of the animal she was on. And the next second the panther was a black streak of silent fury falling through space. Nor was he alone. Only reflex came to my help, otherwise I would have ended up on my face in the grass-grown jungleground. But my thighs did tighten and one arm managed to hold the reins, as Lipso left his feet in a leap after the first panther.

We leaped into the midst of some eight or nine mounted men. The lizard-elks animals they were on were squealing wildly as Lipso and the other beast leaped among them, slashing with claw and tearing with fang. The instant we reached the ground Lovah shouted for me to dismount. Now we were on our own. As I slashed wildly about with the razor-sharp sword, I heard the sounds of battle all about me. But so dense was the underbrush and so furious the action, so disconnected, I got only flashes. But one was unforgettable. Jimno had engaged the largest of the enemy, a man

I tightened my legs around the body of the panther as the animal leaped straight at the oncoming horde, and my sword arm rose to slash quickly . . .



perhaps a foot taller than himself.

The single glimpse I caught was of Jinno being pressed back into the jungle by the power of the other's sword play. Then they were lost to my sight. Nor was I interested any further. Death and I had come to grips. The sword in my hand was like a broom handle for all I knew of its use. And these men *we* had ambushed had been trained since childhood to its murderous use.

There was only one factor which saved me from instant extinction. We were fighting in brush. There simply wasn't room for fancy footwork and dexterous strokes. It was hack and chop and duck, and when it came to that I didn't have to take a back seat to anyone. A lifetime spent in ducking girls I'd promised things to came in use.

He got in the first chops, but he didn't lick his lips from them. I ducked and



took a couple of whacks myself. They were as close to the mark as Stalin and Taft. All the time my brain was worrying about Lovah. After all I was fighting even. She was taking on the rest. He came at me again, and this time I waited until he was a couple of feet from me, about the length of a sword stroke. The stroke I used was my favorite service stroke in tennis. I was a shade slow. But it was enough. He got his blade up

in a parry. Holy cats, what happened to him should happen to the rest. Something strange happened to Hank and myself in our journey from the Earth to this place. Our strength multiplied tenfold. My blade not only knocked his to one side but the end four inches sliced right through his collar bone and down into his chest. He let out a single screech and fell backward, blood fountaining out from the huge wound.

I wasted no time in sympathy. There were the ringing sounds of blade striking blade not far from me. I leaped over a fallen log and into the place where Lovah was battling. She had backed up so that she had her shoulders to a huge tree. Facing her were four men. Two others lay in the curious positions the dead assume.

MY APPROACH was silent. The first they knew of my presence was when one of them fell face forward. He fell straight down. He looked kind of funny, what with his head going one way and his body another. Nor did I waste time in watching him. Once again my tennis came to a more different use. I'd used a forehand on the first. The second fell into a backhand that Riggs would have envied. There was only one thing wrong with it. I clouted this character across the chest. The blade went all the way into him. And stuck there. I yanked at it and finally stuck one foot up against the guy and tried to pull it out, but no use. It wasn't till I thought of the dead man's sticker and turned and picked it off the ground that I realized that all the time I was vulnerable to attack from the other two.

I needn't have worried. They were being taken care of but good. My Lovah child was no mean shakes with the sword. Those two characters were dancing a pretty good Lindy to the tune she was playing. I'm sure they wanted to be anywhere else but where they were. Even as I watched she lunged with her sword straight out and pinked one of the boys right through his throat. He wasn't going to swallow anything for a long while without it leaking out.

"*Lovah!*" I screamed suddenly. "Watch it!"

She had slipped on a wet spot of grass and in that second the other one was at her side. Her sword had flown

out of her hand as she threw up her arms trying to maintain a balance. She was completely helpless and I was too far from her to help. There was but one thing to do. I lifted my sword and heaved it, point forward. The guy's sword was already coming down when mine hit. It went all the way through him. He fell straight down over the girl. And from where I was standing it looked like I'd thrown too late.

"Angel," I moaned as I ran forward and knelt at her side. I shoved the carcass of the goon who'd fallen over her, to one side and lifted her up. "Angel! Talk to me. . . ."

"I will," she said, "as soon as I get my breath back. Now," she continued after I'd kissed her for a while, "let us get out of here. They'll organize soon and we are too few to do more than we have. . . ."

She arose and puckered her lips into that tuneless whistle. In a second the two panthers came trotting to us. Their snouts were stained with blood and it drooled from the corners of their mouths. They hadn't been loafing either. Lovah leaped into the flat saddle and I followed. There was no need to give the animals their orders. They knew by instinct what was expected of them.

Whirling, they loped off at top speed through the thick growth. In a short while we joined the rest at the rendezvous agreed on. We took stock. Our entire losses were one warrior and two panthers. Jimno was elated.

"We have halted them for a while. Now they will proceed with caution which was our purpose. . . . About and make for the hills."

HANK had grim lines to his face. But they were erased at sight of me riding in the fore with Lovah and Jimno. Jimno shouted the news while we were still a hundred feet from the

entire remnants of the camp. A wild yell of exultation went up from their throats at the news. Only Luria held her reserve. But even she could not help but smile.

They surrounded us and asked a hundred questions. I let Jimno take the stage. The guy deserved it. He had staged a masterful ambush and had gotten away with remarkably small losses. Hank dragged me to one side and pumped me dry of what had happened.

The sound of Luria's voice broke up our gab-fest.

"Let us not waste time in useless talk. Jimno and the others did a good job. They have delayed the pursuit for a time. But when they realize how small a force opposed them they will come the more quickly.

"We cannot stay here and we cannot go in a single body to the place where we will be safe. Therefore, I think it best to assign squad leaders to groups who will then take different trails to our eventual goal.

"Jimno, because you have proved your unquestioned leadership, you will take the largest group, all warriors, and fight a rear-guard action to delay and harass the enemy. Wamini and Saavah will lead the women and children by the trail I have outlined, to the place of safety. Lovah, you will be in charge of the balance of the warriors, men and women, who will wait here until Jimno returns, and fight a battle with the enemy. But that can wait until the others have left."

It was remarkable how little confusion there was. Luria amazed Hank and myself in her showing of leadership. It just didn't seem right that so beautiful a woman should have qualities that was rightfully man's. In a very short time several lines spread from the encampment in various directions, some toward the hills close by, others back in the

direction from which we'd just come and one, the smallest group in a direction at right angles to the back trail. This group was led by Jimno. I wondered where they were going. When the last had left, only Hank, Luria, two of her personal guards, and myself were left.

"And now," Luria said turning to Hank and me, "we too must journey. Let us hope we are successful. . . ."

"Why? Where are we going?" Hank asked.

"To the valley of the mists. To that same valley where first you saw me, as though in a dream. There, the Groana Bird makes his home, and there is where the dread beast of flame lives. We must bring back the Groana Bird. . . ."

"Why?" Hank asked again.

"Because it was the symbol of my father's strength. And even Loko will respect it and give up his pretensions. Remember how you were captured? He too wants the bird. But we have one thing in our favor. I know the bird's haunts. He doesn't."

I listened to the first part of it. Then my thoughts wandered. Lovah had been chosen to give battle to the enemy. Of a sudden I felt fear strike at my innards. I knew then, that I had fallen in love with my Amazon. And I was frightened. They had seemed so few, riding back toward, what? Their doom?

"We have a long ride ahead, and a dangerous one," Luria continued. "Talk wastes time. . . ."

IT WAS the longest ride I'd ever been on. Since there was no appreciable change in time, I never knew what was what. We slept, we ate, and we rode, and always the sun was overhead.

There were times for eating and sleeping and after a while I managed to gain a sort of idea from our sleeping habits of an approximate time. We were

on the trail at least one week. The topography held to about the same character until about the last day.

The first few miles of our ride after the awakening on what I called the seventh day, we rode through a narrow valley set between two high and precipitous hills. We had been in the midst of mountain country for a long time. Suddenly Luria, who was riding at the head of our little column, waved her hand to the right and swerved from the path she'd been riding on, to a narrow trail which led straight up the wall of the cliff.

The trail straightened and to my horror became part of the wall itself. Even a Roeky Mountain goat would have found it difficult traveling. Not these panthers, though. They moved swiftly, and surely along the narrow trail. Then, with an abruptness which took my breath away, the trail ended against a barrier of rock. I was next to last so I could not see what Luria was doing or where she was going. I saw only the chalky-white face of the wall towering over us. Lipso had stopped and was waiting patiently to go on.

The panther and its mount directly in front of me began a slow advance and Lipso followed. I saw then where we were heading and my wonder was boundless. A path had been hewed like a tunnel directly into the cliff. And for the first time I knew darkness on Pola.

It was instant. I don't know how the animals managed to find their way. Instinct, I suppose. But the darkness was too much for me. I couldn't see my nose in front of my face. And since our footfalls were muffled we seemed to be traveling in the silence of a tomb.

Once more the transition from dark to light was instantaneous. We were in a shallow amphitheatre but one which stretched for limitless distances. We rode up to join Luria. She looked out

over the mists and said in a small childish voice:

"The valley of the mists, the lair of the beast. My father took me and Mokar here once in the long ago. Mokar has never forgotten. Look . . ."

We followed the line of her outstretched finger and an involuntary shiver shook my frame. Never had I seen a more forbidding place. The mists were like feathers of smoke. They filled the place in breath, width and height. Now and then the mists would part for an instant and black damp rock would show monstrous shapes like a scene from Hell. Strange hissing noises came alive to lend added terror to the prospect. Luria's shoulders squared and turning to us, she said in dry, sure tones:

"We gain nothing here. The Groana bird lies there. Let us be on our way. One thing. The beast of flame lies in wait. Watch for him."

There was but one trouble with being on our way. The instant we moved into the mists it was like stepping into a thick fog. I know I was riding alongside one of the two huge women who were Luria's personal guards. The next I knew, Lipso and I were alone in this strange and terrifying world.

Lipso sensed it immediately and his steps became cautious and slow. He snuffled loudly nor was he alone. The rest of them also used their noses rather than their eyes. The mists would part now and then giving us glimpses of what lay beyond. It also permitted us to see whether we were still together. We weren't. Once I saw Hank. He looked a bit bewildered and his head was moving from side to side as though in search of Luria. The mists closed down and once more we groped our way through the fog.

I echoed in a minor chord the sudden scream which arose from the mists. It

was a human scream. And hard on its heels came a roar which turned me into a block of ice. Lipso grunted a low growl and his body tensed, the muscles bunching under me as though it was getting ready to spring.

Like magic the mists parted altogether and I saw the whole of this horrendous place. We were in a grotto. Directly in front of me was one of the women guards. By her side was Hank. I as usual was the last in the parade. Off to one side away from the rest was Luria. But all of us were looking at what lay before us.

IT WAS a nightmare. The body of the beast was a good thirty feet in length. I recognized it as the same in species as those we had encountered in the pit. But this one was the daddy of them all. Smoke and fire came from its nostrills. The great triangular head moved back and forth like a snake's. And lying under the ridiculous paws was the broken body of the other amazon. . . .

"Back!" Luria shouted. "I'll take care of him."

Hank's shout was lost in the roar which came from the animal's throat. I was too terrified to move. I could only watch the spectacle which followed with a fascinated horror. I noticed little things; the fact that the guard must have come onto the cave that was the beast's lair unaware of its occupant; that the panther she rode must have thrown her in his panic to escape, because she was lying face upward on her back; I saw too that the grotto was immense, the entrance being at least a hundred feet in height.

Then the mists closed in again.

Lovah's admonition came to mind. That if I was ever in a spot to give Lipso his head. I let the reins go slack and the shape below me moved back

and forth in its tracks without making a forward step. When the beast did go forward it was slowly. A rank odor so strong I had to hold my breath at intervals, wafted in to us from ahead. The roars had increased in both intensity and constancy. And now they were closer. . . .

And again the mists lifted.

Lipso halted in his progress. A snarl rose in his throat. The tableaux had evolved in action. Luria too must have stopped when the scene was obscured. Now she went into action. Her lovely body was bent forward until it seemed to lie along the sleek black length of the panther, her spear was couched low, the long needle-tip pointed straight for the beast ahead. I saw her heels dig into Mokar's side. And with a ferocious roar, Mokar leaped forward.

I yelped in horror as Lipso followed Mokar's lead. There had been some sort of telepathic orders from either Mokar or his mistress. Because the beasts of Hank and the other guard also shot toward the beast in the grotto entrance. Luria reached the beast first though we couldn't have been more than ten feet behind. The last fifteen feet Mokar left his feet in a tremendous bound. The terror ahead rose on its hind legs, the tiny paws waving ridiculously toward the woman and her mount. But the terrible snout was open and the rows of huge teeth were an obstacle I never dreamed I'd have to face, directed toward the foolhardy things challenging it.

At the very last second Mokar changed direction with a wondrously lithe movement of his body and instead of coming in from the front, came in from the side. Then Lipso was in the air too. Instinctively I brought my spear to a position similar to the one Luria had used.

A violent roar of rage shook the air.

Luria had driven her spear straight into the leathery skin of the beast's throat. She hadn't waited for the thing to retaliate. Mokar had seen to it. His mission accomplished, Mokar turned tail and leaped to safety. But Lipso wasn't that fortunate.

I was a lot more clumsy than Luria had been. My spear glanced off the thick skin and flew to one side. My thoughts had been on the destructive power of the great teeth and jaws. I'd forgotten about his tail. Suddenly it swished around and caught Lipso full in the side. I heard him grunt softly and felt the beast below me go limp. I barely managed to fall to one side as Lipso was knocked a half dozen feet by the blow. He lay where he fell nor did he so much as move a muscle.

Now the *thing* had something it could vent its spleen on. I managed to get to my feet just as the beast reached me. I had been given a sword. I went for it like an outlaw goes for the Colt at his hip when the Marshall comes for him. I drew it just as I felt the beast's rank breath on my face and saw the saw-teeth within a foot of me. I leaped to one side and as I did swung the long blade.

THE sword went right through the ugly snout. The most frightful roar of all went up and a thick terribly odorous mucous flowed out of the wound in a torrent. The stench of it was overpowering. There was a confused sound of shouting as I backed off a couple of feet. But I was strictly intent on the *thing* in front of me. It hadn't given up the battle. It still had a tail and too obviously no intelligence. Though the wound I had given it was terrible, the beast seemed unaware of it. Its tail swished out again but this time I was on the watch for it. And this time I wasn't alone.

Hank's voice was low but full of strength:

"Okay, pal. Let's go to work."

This time it was we who attacked. Hank took one side and I the other. We leaped in, our swords swinging with perhaps not the finesse of the others', but certainly with better effect. For every time we struck, the steel plowed right through. Either the thickness of skin was deceptive or our strength was greater than we had ever imagined it to be. The whole slaughter couldn't have taken more than a few seconds. The last of the pieces to be dissected was the tail. Two swipes, one a forehand the other a backhand, and the tail was just a memory for Nightmare Moe.

In the meantime the other guard had joined us. Her first thrust with the spear had been a good one. She had managed to withdraw the weapon before her paavan leaped to safety. Now she stood by our side and jabbed with it like a probing needle. I wondered why until quite suddenly the beast sank down and rolled slowly over. The *thing* had a spot through which he could be dealt a mortal blow. The gal did it with one jab.

We stopped our swinging and stood looking at each other, our breaths coming in shallow gasps. The woman, though the label sounded silly, towered over us and had the muscles of a foundry worker. Shook her head in admiration and said:

"Truly, you two are the greatest warriors in all Pola. Never have I seen such sword strokes. Never have I seen such strength. The Habasi is not faced calmly. And this one is truly the largest I have ever seen. His skin is like the thick bark of the Ofas tree which is like a metal. Yet your blades sliced him as though he were meat ready for the table. . . ."

She continued to shake her head in wordless admiration. I noticed that

Hank, however, was no longer basking in the glow of that admiration. His head was bent to one side. Suddenly he snapped the fingers of his free hand and whirled to me.

"Luria! Where is she?"

The mists seemed to have lifted with some degree of finality. At any rate, they no longer enveloped us with their foggy, tenuous fingers. There was nothing to be seen of Luria or Mokar.

The wide nostrils of the woman spread in anger. She hent in a semi-crouch, as though she were sniffing a danger not to be seen. Hank, too, kept looking from one side of the tortured bit of ground as though he thought the girl had fallen among some of the rocks. As usual, when it came to Luria, Hank was the first to guess at her whereabouts. He gathered she hadn't fled the scene. He must have also reasoned then that there was but one place she could be, the grotto that had been the Habasi's home.

Without a word or look, Hank whirled and leaped toward the entrance. I followed but not with as much enthusiasm. In fact the woman was on Hank's heels. There was a dim light as we came into the grotto proper. It died slowly until we were running in total darkness after the first few hundred feet. Suddenly, as though someone had turned on dim lights all over the cave, a radiance came to life. It wasn't much but it was enough to light our way.

WE WERE running on some sort of moss, for our footsteps were soundless. The cave was dry and rather cool. It led straight back and at a slightly downward grade. Suddenly we came against a blank wall. I mean just that. There were no forks in the road we had been running. The cave ended up against that blank wall.

"Wbat the . . ." Hank growled. "But

this doesn't make sense."

"Does anything in this goofy place?" I asked.

"Then where did Luria go?" he asked.

In the meantime the woman had been moving along the wall. Suddenly she hent and began a loud sniffing some two feet from the ground.

"Mokar," she announced, "has been here. His scent is strong here. . . ."

Hank took her at her word. But me, I was skeptical.

"Well," I ventured, "then the only conclusion is that she vanished into thin air. And knowing the young lady as well as we do, I wouldn't doubt it."

"Uh, uh," Hank said, shaking his head doggedly. "There wouldn't be any reason for it."

"No? Perhaps her old man was a smart guy and put this Groana Bird in a place where only his daughter could get at it."

"Then why did he keep it a secret?" Hank asked.

I had no answer for that.

In the meantime the woman had been busy. Her fingers tapped the surface, ran lightly across the face, as though in search of some crack not seen by the eyes. Suddenly she let out a bark of triumph. We stepped quickly to her side.

"What's up?" I asked.

For an answer she slammed the palm of her hand against the rock. It spun away from her and before our astonished eyes we saw a long narrow room, high-ceilinged and with walls of natural rock. At the far end we saw Mokar loling at his ease. Of Luria, nothing was to be seen. Of course we realized what had happened. The wall swung on a pivot. Luria's bodyguard had reasoned that since the trail ended there it had to continue beyond. Her sense of smell had told her that Mokar had come to that

point. Unless they *had* disappeared into air, they had to be somewhere beyond the wall.

Hank was first to step through. I followed and the woman brought up the rear. We saw it simultaneously. In one corner of the room was an immense bird cage. Luria stood beside it crooning something to a brilliantly colored bird which rocked back and forth on a perch. She turned, saw us, smiled a welcome, and turned back to the bird. We came over and ranged ourselves beside the girl. I looked at the bird with curiosity.

They could call it what they wanted, Groana Bird, holy bird, or anything else. As far as I was concerned it was a polly. Hank had the same sentiments.

"A cockatoo," he said in a low voice.

"Aah, shut up," the bird suddenly screamed.

"Shut up yourself," Hank blazed.

"Okay, if that's what you want," the bird said.

Luria turned an angry face to us.

"And just when I had soothed the Groana Bird," she said through slitted lips. "I could, I could . . ." her voice trailed off in helpless syllables.

"Groana, Shmoana," I said. "What is this? He's nothing but a parrot. What's all the fuss about?"

"Yeah," the parrot said. "What's all the fuss for?"

"Do you mean," Hank asked, "that this is the holy bird your father held in such high esteem?"

"The wisest animal in the whole world," Luria said. "What he says becomes law. We must bring him back with us."

"So okay," I said. "Only let's get out of this dungeon. It's beginning to give me the creeps."

I had a swell idea. That is until they began searching for the door to open the cage and discovered there was none. The bars were set close enough to hold

the bird prisoner. I wondered how they had placed him inside. The bird watched our parade around his cage with cocked head and jaundiced eye. After a few moments of it he broke out in his raucous voice:

"Let's not keep up this silly dance. Besides, I'm getting hungry. Let's get me out of this place."

"I'd like to twist that fool head of yours from those feathers," I said viciously.

"Ha-ha!" the bird crowed. "So would a lot of them. So come and get me. . ."

I SAW red then. I saw a lot of other colors, all on the bird, and I had a wild desire to tear that bird in two. I stalked forward, grabbed the bars and twisted, even though I knew I was being foolish. After all, even a dope like me could see they were made to hold something a lot stronger than a bird. But I was mad . . .

They bent as though they were made of spaghetti. There was a last raucous crow of delight, a flash of color past my eyes and the voice of the bird behind me:

"Thanks, pal. I was getting tired of being a bird in a cage. Me, without no guilt . . ."

I whipped around and there was our little feathered friend perched on the shoulder of Luria. I was still seeing red. I gave him a fiendish look (I hoped) and stalked toward the two. Luckily, Hank stopped me.

"Aah, let 'im come," the bird said. "I'll tear 'im in two, or three. I got lots of numbers."

"But only one life, bird. You ain't a cat. Just remember that," I mumbled darkly.

The parrot cocked his head to one side, gave Luria a sidelong look from his bright eyes and said:

"Where'd you find the squares, beautiful? What dopes! Especially the one who talks."

"Oh, Groana Bird," Luria said. "We have searched long for you. The days are dark on Pola since my father left to join his soul-mates . . ."

That blasted bit of feathers and beak just couldn't keep quiet.

"That's what I kept tellin' the old boy. Better watch your knittin' or they're gonna take that sweater apart before you're through with it. So he perled when he shoulda knit and see what happened. But like yap-jaw says, this dungeon's beginning to give me the creeps. And I've been here a lot longer than he. So . . ."

Luria's sigh of happiness, as she turned and started back, was like a song to Hank. He stepped close to her side and grinned down at her from his vantage of two inches with a grin that had it been wider would have set his ears on the other side of his head. Oh, well, I thought, now that the worst is over and we ain't got nothing else to do except pick up the marbles, maybe she'll send us back and I can finish that story for Fa . . .

* * *

They whistled up the dead woman's paavan for me and with the bird still perched on Luria's shoulder we started on the way back. Once more we moved through the valley of the mists but this time the terror was gone. Again we came to the tortuous path along the shoulder of the steep mountain side. And this time, like with all dangers circumvented, it seemed not quite so frightening. I even found myself whistling as the sleek, sure-footed panthers trotted along. We passed a twisted tree I remembered was not far from where we'd come off the main trail. And in a very short while we were on the broad trail leading back to Gayno.

At ease, now, I noticed things which had escaped me before. To our right some hundred yards, a wide river followed a winding path and now and then I could see the swirling muddy waters. To our left the grass grew thick and rank, sometimes higher than a paavan's shoulder. I remembered how the women rose from the midst of grass like this and thought what an excellent ambush it would make. We were running on what I called, a path. I called it that for want of another name. Really it was a flattened area among the other grasses.

Soon we came to the short bit of parkland which once traversed, would lead us to the wider path back to Gayno. The path wound among the trees for perhaps a mile. Then we saw open reaches and shortly the trees thinned and we were racing in the open again. A soft wind ruffled my hair, the air was not too warm and the sun held a brightness which unlike ours did not irritate. For the first time in this strange land I felt peace. But not for long.

THERE must have been a thousand of them. They descended on us like flies. Luria was the first to see them. Some sixth sense warned her of their proximity, for suddenly she drew Molar up sharp, raised a hand on high as a signal to halt, and as the ambush rose about us, shouted a warning. But it was of no avail.

We had been running with some five yards between each rider. There was no chance to get to Luria. I found myself surrounded by dozens of Loko's men. I glimpsed Captain Mita up ahead close to Luria. Then hands were reaching for my bridle. I had no chance to get my sticker out but my fists weren't tied down. I must have knocked ten of them silly before someone thought to use the hilt of a sword on my noggin. I saw

more stars than the heavens held, and in a twinkling the darkness of unconsciousness.

I was being joted like a monkey on a stick. My head rocked from side to side like someone was using it for a metronome. I had been strapped to what was undoubtedly the worst smelling man in all Pola. His stench was unbearable. I peered through bleared eyes at a long line of warriors strung out ahead of us. I managed to turn my head and saw that the line behind us was almost as long.

There was someone ahead swearing a blue streak. I couldn't make the words out but it didn't take long for me to recognize the voice. Good old Groana! He was telling them a thing or two. A lot of good it was doing, I thought. This time we wouldn't get off so easy. What was more, Loko had Luria now. I began to wonder what he wanted of her.

We came to a fork in the road which had widened, and took the right turning. After a while we came to a broad meadowland. Tents had been set up in well-laid sections like streets or, suddenly I knew what, a military encampment. To our right as we entered, was a stockade where I saw a huge number of the strange beasts they used. Sentries were posted every few yards. Their discipline was excellent. The warriors deployed to their respective areas, leaving some ten to guard us as we followed Captain Mita, the giant who had slapped me around, and Loko. We drew up before the most pretentious of the tents. This proved to be Loko's personal quarters.

They had to cut me loose from the guy I was with and whoever did the cutting didn't give a hang whether or not he got some skin with it. In fact he laughed heartily as I yelped more than once when the sticker drew blood. But the moment I was on my feet all

merriment ceased. The point of the man's sword tickled my spine all the way into the shady confines of the tent.

The appointments were simple, a couple of easy chairs of good design, with cushions for seats; several benches of plain wood, and a dozen low hassocks scattered about served for seats. The back wall of the tent was guarded by five men and a like number of women-warriors. They stood stiffly at attention, spears held firmly in one hand while the other was at their hip in readiness to grab at the sword if needed.

Loko and the big guy found seats side by side at the far end of the tent. Loko grunted tiredly and said:

"My years are too many for these strenuous doings. Ye have given me a merry chase. Perhaps it was well that ye escaped the pit. For surely we would not have found our quarry so easily. And better, the prize she carried. Ho, guard, bring the holy bird to me. . ."

WE WERE standing in a close group, Hank, Luria, her guard and myself. The bird was still perched on Luria's shoulder. We had been stripped of weapons. As the guard stepped to Luria's side Hank took a single step forward and knocked the character right on his seat.

"Atta boy. Hit 'im one for me," the Groana shouted raucously. "Kick 'im in the slats."

Loko's voice was low, seemingly without anger, yet I felt a shiver:

"Ye have used force before. Shall we be compelled to answer in the same?"

"No!" Luria's answer was a clarion call. "Enough of force. For hundreds of years Pola has known nothing else. You decry the use of it yet never feel any compunctions about using it when it avails you best. By my father's name I swear the bird will avail you nought. There are other means of freeing Pola

from your tyranny."

I wanted to cheer. For the first time I felt an admiration based on valid reasons, for Lurla. She was all right.

The big guy up there with Loko thought so too. He let out a wordless bellow and rose to his feet.

"By the Groana Bird!" he shouted. "Loko. Your word. I want that woman, hear me?"

"Over my dead body!" came the answer from my side. It was good old Hank. Good old Hank and his good old big yap. Wasn't he ever going to learn to keep it closed? He got the only reply the other character could have given.

"I shall be only too glad to arrange that," the big guy said.

"Enough, Wost!" Loko broke in. "Brawls are for those in their cups. Save it for then. Now then. Enough of this. Bring the bird up here."

This time no one raised either fist or voice when two of the guards stepped out and took the bird from Lurla's shoulder. The one who was carrying the bird carried it gingerly and when he got to Loko handed it to the old man with fingers that shook palpably. There was the strangest look of triumph on Loko's face as he got the bird.

"Now," and this time his voice was raised in ecstasy, "now I shall rule. By the sign of the Holy Groana Bird. By the sign of his feathers, by the sign of his wisdom and by the sign of my possession. . . ."

"Aah, nuts," said the parrot unexpectedly.

"Holy Bird," Loko said in tones of awe, as though the goofy parrot had said something beyond his comprehension, "say more in your infinite wisdom."

"Is this character square?" the bird asked. "Why don't he get the score straight? Boy, oh boy! How did this

oldy get dealt in?"

"I don't know," I said. "Maybe you can arrange his getting dealt out?"

"That's allroony with me, allreeti, allreeti," Groana Gaillard said.

LOKO kept shifting his glance from the bird to me and back again as we carried on. His fingers tapped nervously together in constant motion and his brow showed irritable corrugations in his effort to understand.

"What does he say?" Loko asked me in petulant tones.

"Ingimsay an ongsay," Hank shot at me from the side of his mouth.

"The Holy Bird says," I began as portentously as I could, "that he is weary and needs rest."

"But of course," Loko made haste to fall in to the suggestion. "May he forgive an old man's stupidity. Many, many years have passed in his incarceration. May the memory of the man who enslaved him become dust in our mouths, a stench in our nostrils."

"Gadzooks!" Groana Pistole said. "The varlet needs a cup to wander in. 'Pon my soul! An' by my Lud Harry, with whom I spent many a roistering night, get him one and fill it with the dregs of the grape so that Merry England shall have peace this day."

"Peace? Peace?" Loko said. "He desires peace?"

"Aah! Shut up!" the bird said and bent and nipped Loko on the lobe of the nearest ear.

"He means quiet," I said. "And if I am allowed a word . . .?"

Loko held one hand to his wounded ear and said:

"Say on. . . ."

I decided that formality was the note to strike. Loko liked it well:

"The Holy Bird has some small affection for the girl. Since it is obvious she cannot escape, perhaps it were best

that he stay with her."

"No! I do not trust her. Further, she is, as are the rest of you, my prisoners. I have as yet not decided the disposition I intend of ye."

"'Tis a sorry day f'r the Irish, me lad," Groana Fitzgerald said. "An' sure an' if it's the last act of me life I'll kiss the Blarney Stone on me bands and knees but let me have a chance at a shillalah. . . ."

"You see, Loko," I said in triumph, "another word, a single syllable of denial to his desires, and he promises to call on the holy Blarney Stone. Believe me. Woe betide anyone accursed by the Stone."

Loko blanched to the color of wet ivory at the words. The only one of the three, Loko, Mita and Wost, who showed no alarm at the words, was Wost. But then he was probably too dull-witted to know fear.

"But of course, of course the Holy Bird can stay with the girl," Loko said quickly. "I was but thinking of *its* security."

"Is that schmoe kidding?" Groana Hope asked.

"What does he say? What does he say?" Loko asked. He was like a kid before a mike without a quizmaster.

"He says he's tired and wants to rest," I said.

"Assuredly. Assuredly," Loko said, shaking hands and head at the same time. "The time for sleep has come. Captain Mita. Escort the prisoners."

"Guests might be a better word," I said, being brave all of a sudden.

For the first time Loko showed anger. His eyes blazed for an instant, then hid themselves behind hooded lids. His voice held an icy edge when he said:

"Prisoners. . . . Do not try my patience. . . ."

I shrugged my shoulders in a gesture of bravery I certainly didn't feel. I

knew I was shaking, quivering in fear, yet somehow, I managed to say in quite normal tones:

"Okay. Let it be like you say. Only let's stop with all this talk. I said the bird was tired. Do we have to talk some more about that?"

"Take them to their quarters," Loko bit out.

Captain Mita and his men played escort. It was just to another tent, one not too far from Loko's. There was no question, however, that we were going to be prisoners. Mita posted enough guards around the tent to guard an army. They stood shoulder to shoulder in a huge square, and within that square another, these, backs to the others, and also shoulder to shoulder.

This tent didn't have the accommodations Loko's had. It was not to be expected. But there were several cushions. Luria and her personal guard took those. I hid a smile. Here were a couple of dames who were doing their best to act like men yet used a woman's prerogative immediately the chance presented itself. Hank and I found the ground hard but not too much so.

Very soon after we made ourselves comfortable the feeling for sleep manifested itself. It was a strange thing, this feeling for sleep. There was no night or day on Pola since the sun shone all the time. And the business of sleep was as regulated an affair as though there had been passed a law about it. One's eyes became heavy, one's every muscle felt an odd relaxing and very soon afterward one simply relaxed somewhere and went to sleep.

The strangest part of it all was that sleep was instantaneous all over Pola. It was not up to the individual as to when he slept. When one slept, all slept.

A WAKENING, too, took place simultaneously. I yawned once or

twice, arose and stretched and looked at the others. The parrot blinked its eyes, cocked its head and said:

"Well, bless our little. . . Say! how's about putting on the feed bag, kids?"

Luria and the other woman looked to me. And I suddenly became aware that I had been relegated to the parrot's interpreter. Not that Hank couldn't understand, but I had assumed the position in Loko's headquarters. I wasn't too happy about it. But I wasn't in any position to do anything about it now.

"He just wants to eat," I said sourly.

"Something wrong in that?" the bird asked. "Or am I supposed to live on air?"

"Aah, don't get so fussy," I said. "How did you manage in that cave?"

"It was like this, short, dark and ugly," the bird said. "Believe it or not, I was in a trance."

"So put yourself back in a trance again, and forget about feeding that ugly face of yours," I said.

I ducked just in time. Before the last word had left my lips, Luria leaped for me. She swung a little late. Hank got there before she could swing again. She was white-faced in anger.

"I listened to him berate the Holy Bird yesterday and could barely contain my anger. I did so because he is your friend. But I can no longer contain my anger."

"Daughter. . . Daughter. . ."

We all looked to the parrot, who at Luria's sudden move had hopped to the hassock for safety. He was using a new voice now. Low, deep, flexible, it was a caressing voice, yet not a weak one. It brought Luria up short. I heard her whisper, "Father." Then the bird was talking again:

"Have all my teachings been in vain? Is anger the only vessel of those which I had placed at your disposal, the one

to be used? Anger blinds one's senses, disturbs the delicate balance of reason, and as I once said, should only be used as a dart is used, for purposes of irritation.

"Surely is your predicament great. Surely is the hand of the traitor, Loko, heavy on your shoulders. He seeks the enslavement of all Pola, yet in your womanly manner you seek quarrels. Bend all your energies to the frustration of his desires and ambitions. Use these two whom you have brought from another plane of time and space to your help. Waste not their uses in arguments. Once I taught you the eyes, ears, nostrils, and all other physical senses can be tamed and put to the purpose for which they were intended. How little understanding was given to my teachings. . ."

"No, father!" Luria breathed sharply. "No. . ."

"Perhaps. But had you been alert in all your being, surely you would have understood the badinage between this man and myself. Silence would have been my weapon had I been displeased. But I think altogether, that perhaps the true reason for your lack of understanding lies in your having forgotten something I once said in your hearing.

"Daughter. Do you remember a day you walked into a council meeting? You sat at my feet and heard me tell them about the Holy Groana Bird. It was the first you heard of it. It was also the first they heard of it. I told them that in this bird was all the wisdom, past, present and future. Then, as you sat and watched I called for a slave to bring the bird forth. They marveled at the strange creature, for never had they seen one with such plumage. That very afternoon I spoke to you about trans-migrations of bodies in space and time. You were old enough, wise enough and learned enough even then to add to-



gether the ingredients of the pot and come to the proper conclusion.

"For why, you should have asked, has there never been another such bird found? And how is it possible that this bird alone, of all the feathered beings in the world, is possessed of so much wisdom? I thought you understood. I was wrong. However, that is in the past. The present is bleak indeed. Therefore

let us speak of the future. Loko has naught but ill in his bosom for all of you. Death lies across the threshold. How shall we circumvent him?"

LITTLE by little as the bird continued with his talk, we had drawn up close around him. We were a very tight circle about the hassock on which he stood perched.



Lurlo leaped at me, anger on her face, and I managed to duck just as her fist shot by my face. And I was aware of the loud cries of the Groana bird as it rose into the air . . .

"Daughter. Many years were spent in the teaching of the paavan I gave you. Moka has the instincts of a wild animal. But he has been taught reason. Almost to the capacity of a human. He as well as the mounts of Loko's minions, is in the stockade at the beginning of the encampment. Send a thought wave to him. Tell him to escape and bring the rescuers to us . . ."

I glanced over my shoulder and saw that Luria had her eyes closed. In a second she opened them and smiled. She shook her head as though she had followed her father's instructions.

" . . . Then let us wait as best we can the coming of Jimno and the others. For I think Loko has thought over the arguments of your friend and has decided it were best I were with him."

The bird must have been psychic. The words were scarcely out of his mouth when the tent flaps were thrown back and Mita entered at the head of a squad of men. Without a word he marched up and swept his hand down and grabbed up the bird. The bird let out a frightened squawk but before he could utter another sound Mita drew a hood from his belt and threw it over the parrot's head. In the meantime his squad stood guard with drawn swords over us. We had no chance to do anything about it.

"Tell Loko," Luria said as Mita was about to leave, "that it will do him no good. The Holy Bird has a will of its own. . . ."

Mita smiled craftily.

"I do not doubt that," he said softly. But it is only a bird. If none but Loko hears the pearls of wisdom from its lips who will deny them?"

"I will," Luria said stoutly.

"A carcass has no voice or reason," Mita said, grunted softly at the startled looks on our faces, and left.

"Why, those dirty, dirty. . . ." Hank

snarled and became silent for fear that his words would offend their ears.

But I was way ahead of them. So that was Loko's game. I had to admire the old character's shrewdness. All he had to do was slit the bird's tongue. Then who was there to say that Loko hadn't heard what he said he did? The bird wasn't going to be able to talk for itself. And we weren't going to be in any position, at least not until the dead can be resurrected, to be able to deny what Loko said.

Hank was pounding a fist into a palm. His grey-green eyes were bleak, and his face had that stony look of intense anger. I could almost read his mind. Evidently Luria also could.

"There's no use in empty and useless speculations or threats," she said. "We are helpless until help arrives. So let us be of good cheer."

"But how do you know help will come?" Hank asked.

She smiled and I thought of the Mona Lisa. "Moka will not fail us," she said.

"Moka . . . ?"

"He is well on his way."

"But that stockade," Hank said.

"How was he able to, to . . . ? But of course," understanding came to him, "I only hope he will make it in time. I think Loko won't give us too much of that commodity."

I stuck my two cents in:

"And Loko's just the sort of guy who'd keep us on tenterhooks, draw the time out, let us think that maybe he won't cut our throats or whatever they're going to do, until the last second. Somehow, though, I have an idea that it won't be too soon."

A deep sigh turned our attention to the gigantic woman who was standing by Luria's side.

"What's wrong, Sanda?" Luria asked.

"I'm hungry," was the simple reply.

"The big gal talks sense," I said. "So am I."

BUT food wasn't to come for a long time. We sat around, lay around, talked, kept quiet, did everything to make the time pass more quickly. Luria and Hank got together in a corner and found things in common. I gathered without being told, that Hank was pitching woo at her and from the look on her face she wasn't finding it hard to take. But me, I was lost. The other member of our party was built along the lines of an overweight wrestler. Besides, she was a little short of the grey matter. About all there was for me was some silent philosophy. And that's pretty difficult to do in my position.

When food did come there was enough of it to feed an army.

"Like we'd asked for a last meal," Hank said.

I was taking a bite on something that tasted pretty good. But at that I kind of lost my appetite.

"Why don't you gag yourself?" I asked.

"How about you doing it?" he wanted to know.

"I got both hands busy, dope," I said.

"So why don't you try eating with your feet? Ten fingers aren't enough for you."

"Look, sponge-head," I began edgily. I didn't like the tone of his voice. "I didn't ask to come along on the ride. So don't play Sad-Sack for my benefit. . . ."

"Oh, hell, Berk," he said. "I'm sorry."

"Dont be square," I said quickly. "That was *no* joke, son."

The two women kept giving us wondering glances. Luria could understand the King's English, but our version was over her head. The other gal was just size, no quality, except in muscle, of

course. Suddenly the thought came to me how to make time pass. Talk, I had discovered long ago, is the finest devourer of time.

"Y'know," I said, "I've always been curious as to *how* you managed this business of, now I'm here, now I'm not. Just how do you do it?"

Tiny furrows formed between her eyebrows as she concentrated in an explanation which would be simple enough, yet explanatory:

"Oddly enough," she said, "it's a great deal more simple than you would imagine. Yet in one sense, more complex. You see, the whole thing is a matter of, shall we say, mind over matter. . . ."

"So you said and you're glad," I broke in. "Elucidate on this bit of mental gymnastics."

". . . But because it is mind triumphing over matter the explanation is far more difficult than, say, the process of digestion," she went on as though there hadn't been an interruption.

"*Now* I understand," I said. "How simple the whole thing is, dear. But you're *so* clever. . . ."

"Let her be, Berk," Hank said. "Go on, baby."

"Baby?" The word wasn't new to her but its connotation in the sense Hank gave, was.

"A term of endearment," I said. "But as Hank says, go on."

"Yes-s. . . . Well. I simply *think* the object or person into another dimension of space and time. And that is the whole thing put as simply as I can."

"Fine. I *don't* get it! Tell me this now. When we first saw you, you were dressed in clothes very much the same as the women wear on our planet. How'd you do that?"

"I realized the instant the transposition took place and I saw the manner of dress of your women that I would be

taken for a stranger. Not knowing the customs of your planet or country, I knew I had to do something about it. So I . . ."

NOW wasn't that like a woman, I thought. Give her a joke to tell and she's a cinch to forget the pay line; give her a story and at the most interesting part she'll get that far-away look like as if she'd just remembered something she saw in a blouse and couldn't quite remember the shop. It was Hank, however, who nudged her on:

"So you what?"

"I lost my material self," she said.

I thought I heard right. But I wanted to make sure:

"You dood? Lucky you found it. What do you mean?"

"I mean I was no longer flesh and blood. For example, the outfit I wore. I got that from a shop on a city avenue. I remember it was dark and I simply walked in through the masonry and glass, took the outfit I wanted and left. It was not the time for sleep so I walked about. I also remember an experiment I performed. This disappearance of material self was new to me. There was a man coming toward me. I walked straight at and through him. I remember it so well because he was with a woman and they were holding a conversation. He did not lose a word as I stepped through him."

So there *were* ghosts. They all come from Pola. H'm. Could that mean there was no Heaven, no Hell, just Pola? Aah. What was I thinking? Hank, it developed, wasn't thinking what I was.

"How simple it all is," he said. "All you have to do is dematerialize, step through the tent and escape."

"I thought of that and . . . No. We are all in this together. So we'll remain."

"But Loko will put you to death," Hank pointed out.

"When that bridge is on us we'll think about the crossing. Let us wait to see what Mokar brings."

"I don't know what he's bringing," I said. "But I hope he makes it fast. My patience is running out."

"Then you'll have to renew it," Luria said sharply. "Mokar might have come to Jimno in the midst of an engagement. What's more, they have to be certain that the children are in a safe place; that there will be enough guards; then they must locate Lovah and her force. . . ."

"Lovah? Coming here?" I asked.

"But of course. Jimno's forces will not be enough."

The whole situation was bathed in a new light. I was light-hearted Joe, ready for a lark or a wrestle, but now that my Lovah-honey was going to be involved—well! Things were shaping up. And not to my liking, either.

"But holy cats!" I said. "Even with Lovah's warriors there won't be enough to make a decent fight."

"It will be a combination of several factors," she pointed out. "In the first place there will be the element of surprise; secondly, Jimno and Lovah will not attack from the same direction; and thirdly, there is the factor of the paavans. . . ."

I asked what they had to do with it.

"They were bred not for riding alone. Wait," she promised. "You will see how terrible they can be."

Hank got to whispering to her again so I sat in my little corner and digested what she told me. Maybe we had a chance. Then I got to thinking of the parrot and how she was going to manage to get him out of Loko's clutches. Hang it! I kept thinking of the bird as a material being. It was Luria's father, of course. Then I thought how silly that was, especially if one said it aloud. Then I stopped thinking.

Again time marched on. Suddenly I saw Luria place her hand to Hank's lips. He stopped talking and I stopped dreaming. She had heard something, something to which our Earthly ears were not attuned. She arose with a movement akin to one of her paavans, she rose lithely and stepped toward the tent opening. The rest of us followed suit.

"They come," she whispered. "I hear them in my mind. I don't know their plans, so be prepared for anything."

SHE warned us. But what happened was the last thing I thought would happen. *Fire arrows . . .!*

There must have been hundreds of them. They fell with tiny hissing sounds and whatever they touched burst into flame. In an instant the entire compound was a mass of fire and smoke. But we didn't wait to see what was going to happen next. Not us. We were the Rover Boys and gals, and we roved but fast, to hell and gone out of there.

A torment of sound stuck our eardrums as we hit the open air. There were the terror-stricken sounds of men and women caught in the inferno, and above those were the horrible screams of animals tied to stakes and unable to escape. A pungent acrid odor came to my nostrils, an odor hard to place until I brought to mind a roast that had become too well-done.

I was just standing, listening open-mouthed to the horror around me, when I heard a wild scream of exultation almost in my right ear. I pivoted and saw Luria, her face transfigured, looking straight down the avenue formed by the rows of tents. I understood her cry of triumph when I saw what was sweeping down the avenue. Mocar, riderless, was in the lead and directly behind him was Lovah and Jimno riding neck and neck in a wild race to get to us first.

Mocar paused only long enough for Luria to mount and get Hank up behind her and then, headed straight for the center tent, Loko's quarters. Lovah, looking like one of the Valkerie, only prettier, paused long enough for me to get on behind, then she was off after her queen. She handed me one of the two swords she held clenched in each of her dainty, though dangerous, fists.

She raised hers on high and screamed: "For the Queen! Death to Loko and his!"

But it wasn't quite that easy. Captain Mita and the giant were no stupes. They were caught flat-footed, shocked with surprise. But it didn't last long. Only long enough for them to start a dispersal of their forces. And the first thing they did, as though they realized the whole purpose of the attack, was to ring Loko's tent with guards. We rode, like the six hundred, into the jaws of death.

I don't know how many Luria had at her disposal; I had no chance to count even if I wanted to, but certainly they weren't many. We hit the outer shell of the ring with the force of a battering ram, broke through and were swallowed by the inner rings. And, baby, were those guys and gals tough! Loko hadn't picked these babies for their kindness to their fellow-beings. They played the woodchoppers ball pretty good with their stickers.

By some quirk of fate Loko's tent was one of several the fire-arrows had missed. All around us the other tents blazed in fury. I caught a quick glimpse of them, then had no time for anything but the defense of my life and Lovah's too. Her arm was swinging a death tune to whoever was within reach of that terrible plaything. As for me, I was also swinging, maybe not with the assurance or ease of Lovah, but with as terrible effect. As I said before, I had discovered

a strange thing about Pola. My strength was multiplied ten-fold for some reason, and though I did not always hit a vulnerable spot, the power of my blow when it did land was enough to decide the issue immediately.

But there was only one of me and Hank. The sheer weight of their numbers, plus the addition of reinforcements which kept arriving, lost us the encounter. A shrill whistling sound was suddenly heard and Lovah's face turned to mine with a dismal look of despair on it. I heard her words:

"Retreat! Luria calls retreat. . . ."

THEN her mount's head was turned and we were racing like the wind back down the avenue of tents for the open ground beyond. We raced into the flat and kept running. I kept turning my head and saw Jimno. My heart leaped in my throat in sudden terror. I couldn't spot Hank or the girl. My pulse raced in time to the bounding paces of Lovah's paavan when I saw them at last. They were the last two out of the compound. Like a true queen, Luria had waited till the last of her subjects were away before she retreated.

We continued running at top speed for quite some time. As we raced onward endlessly Lovah gave me a resume of what had happened:

"Jimno is wonderful. A born leader. He caught the rear guards who had been left in town flat-footed. They hadn't a chance, and we mashed them to bits. Then we did an about face, ran in different directions, met at the rendezvous and made for the groups which we knew would be scouring the countryside for us. One by one we smashed them until at the end they were forced to join together. That was the moment for the third part of our forces to strike. The enemy was tired; we had fought them to a stand-still, and when the fresh

forces attacked, they fled. Only to be met," she ended proudly, "by the paavans we let loose. Aah! The terror and destruction our wondrous paavans meted out!"

I could well imagine. I'd seen those gigantic panthers at work only a short while before, and what they could do to human flesh was not pretty.

She went on:

". . . But we were still too-few. Loko must have enlisted the aid of every warrior on Pola. More and more kept coming. Their sheer numbers would have lost any pitched battle. We had to let off finally. Then came the message from our Queen. . . ."

I looked from side to side and tried to gauge how many there were of us. It couldn't be done. We were strung out in a long line and since we were running in the flat which reminded me of the prairie of a midwestern state, many of them were out of sight in the hip-high grass.

"Are we retreating to some plan?" I asked.

"Yes. The Great Forest lies ahead. Not even the bravest of all the warriors on Pola would dare venture in its depths. Ambush is only a matter of hiding behind a tree. Loko isn't that big a fool."

AFTER a while Luria's forces merged until we were no longer stretched out in a long line although we were still riding loosely in groups of ten or twelve. Both Luria and Jimno rode their mounts close so that the three of our paavans were running abreast.

Luria seemed dispirited. Hank had his mouth close to her ear and I could see he was trying to break her mood. Maybe I know more about dames than Hank does. At any rate I put my two cents in.

"Cheer up, kid," I said. "We haven't

lost yet. . . ."

"We *won't* lose at all!" she said. "I wasn't thinking of how the battle stands. It's, it's . . ."

I divined her worry. That silly bird. H'm! To her it wasn't silly at all. It was her *father*. . . I kind of grinned and she noticed it.

"He smiles," she said grimly. "He is more brave even than I thought. The moment is dark and your friend smiles, Hank. He is a man."

"He's a damn fool," Hank said. But his eyes were twinkling in fondness. Henry Fondness, I called him. "He just doesn't know when to worry."

"The only thing I worry about is meeting a deadline for Ray Palmer," I replied. "But that wasn't what I was thinking about. I think I know what's bothering our pretty Queen. The bird. Aha! I was right. . . ."

She had turned her head in surprise.

". . . Well. I'm not raising an issue, understand, when I say stop beating that pretty head against a wall. The bird is just one of the many things that I don't understand about this place. But you understand. That's what counts. So it's simple. He says he's your father. Then surely he won't play tricks with you. Loko seemed greatly impressed with him."

"You forget," she broke in. "All Loko has to do is wring the bird's neck. . . ."

Hank was ahead of us both.

"He can't," Hank said. "The bird is a symbol known to everyone. But unless a symbol is visual it loses its significance. Your father was more than just smart. He gave himself the body of a bird the likes of which can't be found anywhere on this planet. Loko won't be able to find a substitute so he'll have to let him live. He will probably rig some sort of fol-de-rol about him being the only one able to understand the bird's words, or perhaps the only one who is

allowed to converse with the bird. He can't afford harm to come to the bird."

Of course my thoughts ran in an altogether different direction. I'd been puzzling about the bird without getting any satisfactory answer. Maybe I wasn't supposed to. But if the old gent had been such a world-beater in the wisdom line, he hadn't proved it by doing what he had. What was more, I didn't believe the bird. That business of imitating Barry Fitzgerald, and the others —of course with four or five different voices he would sound more mysterious. On the other hand, if he was that smart he should have been smart enough to have known that Loko and any one else who wanted to rule had but to find him and such a situation that was now at hand, would come about. There was something not very bright about that bird, or something too bright for me to get.

Lovah whispered in an aside to me. I didn't hear her and she repeated:

"The Great Forest is at hand. Very soon it will welcome us."

I looked ahead and saw a wall of trees which stood so close together not a shred of light seeped into their depths.

"You could hide an army in there," I said.

"As I told you," Lovah agreed.

"But how do we get in?" I asked.

"The paavans will find the path. This is where we find them."

SHE spoke the truth about the panthers knowing their way. Straight as a die they sped for the solid wall ahead. As we came close the place looked a little terrifying. We had to stretch out again in a single line. Luria took the lead, Lovah, with me grasping her close about the waist a little more tightly than usual, came next. I caught a glimpse of Jimno holding up his mount. I imagined he was going to cover

the rear. Then we were in the damp darkness of the forest that was really primeval.

Strange cries rang out as we crossed the border between light and darkness. Rank odors filled our nostrils. It took several seconds for our eyes to accustom themselves to the gloom. Fitful rays of light seeped through the tangled foliage. But nowhere was to be seen a single area even a few feet across on which the blessed sun fell.

As we proceeded deeper I became aware of hidden creatures, some quite large, stalking us from the borders of brush which were walls too thick to penetrate. Now and then one of these creatures let out a sound to betray its presence. There were roars which could come only from the throats of a paavan, shrieks which terrified because one didn't know or could imagine their owners. My hair stood on end for so long a time I thought it was starched.

"Where are we bound for?" I asked, and suddenly realized I'd spoken in a whisper.

"In a little while we will come to our trysting place," Lovah said.

She knew what she was talking about, all right. Quite suddenly the trees thinned and I caught a vista of an immense meadow. Then the trees closed in again. But as though the glimpse of the promised haven lent wings to the feet of the paavans, they sped forward with increased speed. Too much speed. Because when we passed the last line of trees we were traveling at such speed we couldn't stop or disperse. The ambush which had been laid for us was perfect.

THEY must have known of it. Or perhaps Jimno and Lovah hadn't done such a good job, or perhaps, more reasonably, they had tortured someone into telling the hidden secret. But they

fell on us with the force of limitless numbers.

At least ten of them surrounded Lovah and myself. They were mounted on the monstrous lizard things. In the still-tangled brush before the open meadow, their mounts had the speed of ours. It was the pay-off, I thought, as I began to flay about me with the sticker Lovah had given me.

The ones who surrounded my gal and me were women. For the barest second I had some misgivings about using the sword in my fist. But only until one of them missed me with a wild swing. Then I swung. The blade went through her like a knife going through soft butter. Her mount kept moving forward and for a second her body hung together. Then the top half separated from the bottom and rolled off. But I hadn't time to gloat over it. These dames were crazy. They'd spur up and jab and swing, get in each other's way, all trying to knock us off at one time. Lovah had gone to the proper school. Her timing would have made Joe Louis green with envy. Nor did she waste motions in wild swinging. Every stroke of her sword was clipped and sharp. If only I wasn't behind her.

I proved the handicap. And the denouement. For in one of my wild swings I knocked her off balance. And myself off the paavan. I reached wildly with my free hand, tried to maintain a semblance of equilibrium, and in the end got neither and fell off. The women fell on me with savage screams of exultation. How I managed to fight my way clear of the forest of cleaver-like blades which thirsted for my blood, is a mystery to me. But somehow I did, to get to a nearby tree. I wanted the protection of its thick trunk. I knew it was only a temporary respite. Still I could not give up hope.

That I did not escape to my tempo-

rary haven without damage went without saying. Why Hank and I had never exchanged our garments for the more protective, though scantier garb of the Polans, I do not know. But at that moment, with my back to the thick tree trunk, I wished we had. I was bleeding from several nicks and one gash; a sword had ripped across the flesh of my chest, splattering me with a crimson rain. It wasn't a mortal blow, only a flesh wound, but I knew that if I didn't receive attention it would prove damaging. Far more so than the other wounds I got.

My shirt hung by scattered slivers of blood-soaked threads to my body. One sleeve had been torn completely away. The blood had run down into my trousers which were torn by the briars and looked more ragged than a hobo's. I sweated and stank like a draught horse on a hot summer's day. And I was besieged by a dozen women who thirsted for my life. The instant I was unmounted six others had come up on the run. I hacked away inexpertly but with telling damage. And gradually the sheer strength I displayed won both their admiration and their respect.

I managed a quick glance around during a short breathing spell. We weren't doing so well. I could see any number of riderless paavans. Of Luria and Hank nothing. . . . Then they were at me again. Once more I took up the seemingly endless task. And this time it was harder. No longer did they come at me together, getting in each other's way, fouling up their sword play and making themselves easy marks for my blade.

This time they came at me singly and in quick succession. And on dancing feet. My swings were a little wilder, a little slower. I stopped after a moment and waited until one came in range before swinging. Again they

changed their tactics. This time two came at me at once, one from right and the other from the left. And while I tried to keep both off, two more came from in front. I knew it was but a matter of a short while and they would wear me down. Nor was I wrong. Three times in a row I got the point of a sword in me, not deeply, but damagingly.

I HAD a last resort. Hy speed afoot. I *could* outrun them. Suddenly I leaped straight forward. I jabbed twice, missed one and got the second, and lost my sword in the maneuver. It went in too deeply and I had no time to pull it free. But I no longer cared. For coming toward me at a full gallop, was Lovah. I had lost sight of her after I had been knocked off her paavan. I could see as we rushed to meet each other that she too had not escaped unscathed from the fray. One arm hung limp, there was a bloody streak across the firm white flesh of a shoulder. But her eyes were ablaze and her face alight.

We were almost at meeting's point when I suddenly sprawled face downward in the marshy loam I was in. A creeper had tripped me. I struggled to get to my feet. But after two tries my knees gave way and I fell, rolling to my back.

The sky, seen through the filigree of black branches never looked so blue. Of course there were no clouds, just the cerulean blue which merged into the gold of the eternal sun. All this in the space of seconds. Then another something intruded into the scope of my vision. It was only a sidewise glance. Terror and death was coming my way. The most gigantic woman I'd ever seen was leaping toward me on huge splay feet, in her hand a sword fully ten feet long. Her expression was demoniac with transfigured fury. Her great breasts were bare and like those of monstrous

cattle. I was powerless to move. The sweat was a sour river pouring down my face, saturating me in its stench. I felt a horror beyond words as she slid to a halt at my very side. Then the sword was lifted high above her head, her both hands clenched about the hilt. . . . Eons went by, worlds were born and died, civilizations crumbled and death marched to muffled drum beats and stepped before me and bared its horrendous snout to my eyes and its cavernous mouth opened to swallow me . . . *and the sword shot downward!*

I heard the thin screech and swish of it, felt its cold breath on my cheek but saw it not. My eyes were closed for that infinitesimal instant. They opened and I saw its silvery length quivering and undulating beside my cheek like a frustrated pendulum. To one side stood the giantess her hands tight about the blade of a sword which stuck out of both sides of her thick throat. She was trying to free her flesh of its grasp. Then her hands fell to her sides and a thick stream of blackish-blood poured from her mouth, her nose, her throat, and enveloped her in a redly-funereal garment.

"Quickly!" a voice came from above me.

I looked dazedly in its direction. There she was, my Lovah, a delight to my eyes and a balm to my soul and a saviour of my flesh. Her hand, firm and strong as a man's reached down and took my lax fingers and hauled me erect. I let myself go limp across the thickly-muscled shoulders of her paa-van. Her fingers fell lightly across my sent courage coursing through me. I bent my head back and she brought her face down and once more our lips met, not as they had before, in passion, but in the gentle caress of true love.

Her hand lay across my shoulder as we turned to face the enemy. Fear had

been banished from our hearts though our arms were gone from us. . . .

They surrounded us. They were many and though they were armed and we were not they moved carefully, as though they could not believe our state or the fact that there were only two of us. We waited for their stings to bite us. . . .

"Alive! Take them alive!" one of them called unexpectedly. "The man is the one who escaped the Pit!"

THE beast across which I lay stank to high heaven. I was bound hand and foot and lay belly down across its rump. Behind me rode one of the Amazons. Somewhere behind Lovah rode prisoner also. Now and then we passed clumps of dead and though it was impossible to count them, I could see when the bobbing motion of the elk-lizard allowed, that the greater part of the heaps of dead were Lok's people rather than Luria's. Not that I received any consolation from it. Now that I had passed safely through the period of shock following the battle, I could see again with at least a small measure of equanimity what lay ahead. The future to put it in technicolor, wasn't very bright. In fact someone had exposed the film before shooting. For some reason I had stopped bleeding. I was on the weak side but at least I wasn't going to bleed to death. Hooray for me, I thought. They're probably saving me for a fate worse than death. I wouldn't have given a hang had it not been for Lovah.

Oddly enough our ride was shorter than any I had gone on willfully or otherwise. Whether my senses had dulled to time in this strange land or whether the ride *was* short it didn't take us long. The pueblos of Loko's town hove into view shortly.

There were lines of people waiting

our arrival. I could *feel* their hatred though I could not see them. I could feel as we passed through the oddly silent cordon of *hating* men, women and children, that we were the objects of their hate, and possibly of their revenge. I could understand it too. We, Jovah and I, were the symbols of the death many of Loko's people met. Oh, it was true that *we* weren't directly responsible. But we were *here*, and we were prisoner. We rode a gamut there under the hot sun and not a finger was raised in our defense. I heard Lovah's first shriek of pain, her first outcry. There were no more: I suffered the tortures of the damned until we reached our goal. For from my own experience, I knew what Lovah must have gone through. They had used their fists, clubs, their teeth and nails and feet on me. Stones had pelted me until it seemed as though there wasn't a whole bone in my body. But I was damned if I'd let a single sound of pain escape me. And Lovah had allowed only the first cry to pass her lips.

Those were the physical things. There were dirtier, nastier things, ordure and worse which stung us. But at the end we came within the orbit of Loko's palace and some small measure of safety from the browd. Our hands were cut and even as I staggered around on stumbling feet I saw that Lovah was all right. But they gave us no rest. Once more I met the long halls and corridors of Loko's palace. And once more we were dragged before the dais on which stood the table and throne. This time Loko, Captain Mita and the giant warrior sat without their women. I gathered it was a change of time.

Loko no longer looked the benevolent old man. His face was no longer benign or wise. It was twisted in an expression of absolute rage. Saliva, white-frothed like foam had gathered at the corners

of his mouth and hung suspended like soap bubbles.

"Little beasts! . . . Animals! . . . Traitors, she-devil and he-devil . . . You thought to make small of me . . . hut my trap caught you. . . Ahh! That they did not make it strong enough for the arch-devil woman, Luria. But she will not escape long. Already they seek her. . . She will be found. By her hair, by her toe nails will I have her dragged before me! And also her consort, the devil from another world! . . . He didn't bring a magic more powerful than what I possess."

"Aah, shut up!" I snarled up at the shrieking old loon. "You sound like you're losing your marbles. Not that you ever had any."

MY WORDS stopped the tirade. I thought I caught a gleam of admiration in Mita's eyes. But the old man had the floor and he was going to keep it. Suddenly he grinned and I noticed for the first time that he had no teeth. Well, after all if I were as old as he I don't imagine I'd have any either.

"The fool teaches the wise," he said. "You are quite right, my friend. . . ."

"Don't call me friend," I said sharply.

". . . I permitted my emotions the upper hand. But only for the moment. In anger. Now they must savor another pleasure. This one, however, I had promised myself on your first escape. I had thought to hold myself until I had your friend and the woman, Luria, altogether. . . ."

Once more I broke in:

"I'll never dance at your wedding, you old goat, but I hope to caper at your funeral."

". . . but since that isn't possible at this moment, I will contain myself for the present. Of course I must have the satisfaction of a partial enjoyment. Slaves! The whips!"

I was too weak to fight. I was too weak to even stand. But I was damned if I'd give way. Not so long as there was breath in my body, or so I thought.

They bound us together face to face. Not just our hands and feet but strands of wire-rope about our waists and legs also. I could see the man who had the whip to be used on Lovah and she could see the one who was to do the dirty work on me. But neither could see their respective whippers. They shoved us around until they had us satisfactorily arranged to Loko's liking.

"Lean your head on my shoulder," I said. "If it gets bad, honey, take a good bite out of my shoulder, cry, sing, do anything but scream. I won't be able to take that. . . ."

All the time I was talking I was waiting. I had an idea the old devil on the dais was going to give the signal for the torture to begin by a nod of his head. His mind operated that way. It was the reason why he had us placed in profile to those on the platform. He knew the psychological torture we were going through.

I had always wondered what could be the most terrible thing in the world. I found it out then. Waiting! Just plain waiting for anything. Especially when you know it's going to be unpleasant. I could get a very unsatisfactory glimpse of Loko and the others from a corner of one eye. It wasn't enough to define movements, or even to see the shake of a head, but I could see them. As the seconds dragged by I tried to turn my head to see more. The men who had bound us were masters of their art. So subtly had they wrought with the strands of wire rope that though I could move my head it was only to the part of an inch. More, and I would strangle.

My attention was suddenly focused on the bronzed giant who was standing, whip in hand, behind Lovah. The mus-

cles in his arms and shoulders were like those of some Atlas. He had stood impassive and immobile while others had pushed us about. Suddenly he flexed his arms, the muscles rippling, flesh-like-water. The immensely long whip coiled writhingly on the stone floor, as though it were a snake in agony. I saw then, that the lash was divided in three parts, like a very long thonged leash. He raised the whip and moved it about. Faster and faster until it began to sing in the air. Suddenly he snapped it. The sound was like that of a pistol shot. Lovah, who was unaware of what was going on gave a startled movement of fear. I looked in her eyes and grinned.

"Gonna be tough," I said. "I love you, honey. . . . It's a hell of a time to say that. But maybe it'll help."

"Love?" she whispered. "It is a strange word. But we have such a word here if I think it is what you mean. I love you too, man of another world. You are the first I have ever said that to. Nor will I ever say it to another. I was afraid only this moment. But now, why, it is as though fear never existed. Are we not together? Are we not bound to each other, body to body? Surely, if it is within the bounds of reason, so will our souls be bound. But not with strands of rope, but with the infinitely greater fibres of love, as you call it. Do not worry, man of mine, I will not cry out, though they beat me to eternity."

If I had had tears I would have shed them. If I had had the strength to tear myself from the prison they had bound me in I would have ripped their torture cell to bits and them with it. But I could not. I could do nothing but wait. *Wait. . . . THE TERROR OF A WORD WHICH BECOMES A SOMETHING PHYSICAL. . . .*

THEN there was no more waiting. The word had been translated into

the deed. I heard the swish of the fibre snake. It made an eerie whistling sound as it zipped through the air. And hit! . . .

For an instant the shock was so great I could do nothing, say nothing. All I could do was *feel*. Once I had written of liquid fire being poured on someone. I suddenly knew how that hero of the pulps felt. Pain was like ecstasy, pain was like suddenly losing the world one was in and in an instant being brought into another world. I didn't even hear the sound of the second stroke. Only the feel of it.

Pain became translated into something else. Colors. First there was blackness. Just an oily pool of black into which your mind sank. That was with the first blow. The second brought a tinge of red into the blackness. After the third I stopped counting. Just the colors and the pain. Reds and purples and black, always the black like a curtain which burned when one went behind of and out of it.

The pain was something else. It always began with the area which had been hit, then spread. It was like the thin sound of a single violin string which had been plucked. The sound leaps from the thin wood panelling and spreads instantly in all direction. So with the pain I felt. Every single inch of me vibrated to the feel of pain.

Of a sudden I heard a voice.

Well, maybe it wasn't a voice I heard. Maybe it could best be called a sound. Surely, I would have thought, had I been capable of thinking, nothing like that could be called a voice. It wasn't human, nor was it animal. I knew what it was, though. It was the sound of *pain*! It was the cry of the tortured and the damned. It was the sound of man being beaten, whipped, terrorized. It was the cry of all humanity wrapped up in a single throat.

Oh, do not think there is no limit to pain. There is. I began to develop an odd immunity to it. Not that it wasn't always present. Only it became pushed into the background. Taking its place, as though in compensation, a new world was conceived. It was a strange world. There were only three people in it, Loko, Lovah and myself.

The first glimpse I had of this strange world took place as though on a screen which had been shoved onto my mind of a sudden. We were in some sort of cave. The walls glowed redly from the reflections of hidden fires. Lovah, stark-naked, was dancing about a figure bound to a stake. She was brandishing a pitchfork. Another figure stalked in from off stage somewhere. I recognized myself. I watched myself move forward toward the nude figure cavorting about the stake and the man tied to it. Then I wasn't watching anymore; I was myself walking toward Lovah. She was singing a tune but the words did not make sense:

*"Old Loko's hanging from a stake;
Old Loko's but a broken rake.*

*Soon he'll fry,
We must turn him.*

*Soon he'll fry,
Soon we'll burn him.*

*Old Loko's hanging from a stake;
Brittle bones, bones will break."*

From ten feet off I took an immense leap, like that of a male ballet dancer, and landed beside Lovah.

"Ho-ho!" I chortled. "We have the old huzzard now, haven't we? My pet, I worked hard over the fires, but they'll make the labor worth it when we fry him. Have you pricked him to see how the juice runs?"

Lovah did a pirouette completely around the old man tied to the stake. She laughed gayly and a deep groan echoed the light sound. The groan came from Loko. At the sound Lovah



They bound Lovah and I together, face to face, and then the whip lashed out at us and curled around our bodies—again and again—until the pain seemed too great to bear . . .

stopped dancing and I came close.

"Please," the old man said. "Spare this old greybeard. . ."

"Grey beard," I said in fine scorn. "Why there isn't a hair on that bald dome of yours and not even fuzz on that chiny-chin-chin you call a chiny-

chin-chin."

"Rhetoric," the old man replied. "Merely rhetoric. A phrase. A passing thought. But, and this is more to the point, surely you would not harm an old, old man like me."

Lovah and I burst into delighted



laughter. She whirled lightly about me and came to rest at my side, her eyes laughing up to mine and her lips inviting a kiss. I accepted the invitation. Loko groaned at sight of it.

"Oh, don't pay any attention to the old frastrate," Lovah said. "He's just

jealous. He's just jealous because we're going to eat and he isn't. . ."

"Ho-ho," I laughed again. "He isn't going to eat. He's just going to be the eaten."

"Spare me! Spare me," the old jerk groaned.

"Spear him! Spear him, he says.
Spear himmmmm. . ."

THE words died away in a long humming sound. The scene faded. The world of fantasy collapsed. Only the hum remained. I came back to reality to the sound of that hum. And found it was I who was making the sound.

"... Berk ... oh, man of mine ... please! Hear me. . ."

Her cheeks were dew-wet against mine from the tears she had shed. Her voice was a sobbing entreaty which I could not deny. Strange, I thought, and it was the first time in the eons which had passed that I had been able to bring thought to my tortured mind. I can no longer feel the whip.

Her voice went on, her breath tickling my neck:

"... Stop doing that, Berk. Not any more. I can't stand it. I'll break too if you don't stop. . ."

"It's stopped, honey," I said. "Guess I went off the deep end. What happened? The guy get tired?"

Her head went back and her eyes were bright as stars and twice as beautiful. Her lips managed a smile. But two last tears coursed down the paths others had sown and hung poised, like wondrous jewels, on the curve of her cheeks. I would have given the breath of my life to lift my hands and brush them into a cup to hold precious forever.

"N-no. I think you fainted and Loko told him to stop."

"Well, that was nice of Loko. I can't say that I don't appreciate it. I'm puzzled, though. . ."

Her eyes asked a question.

"... My back," I said. "It should at least smart. But I don't feel a thing. Hey! Maybe I'm just numb from taking it?"

"No. They covered you with some sort of salve. I saw them place it on you."

"Ho, slaves," Loko suddenly announced he was still alive. "Undo the bonds about the two but leave them bound."

They turned us so that we were facing the three up there. That is I thought there were three. It turned out there were four. The fourth was one of the women warriors. She was leaning over Loko's shoulder, talking earnestly to him in low tones, accenting with her hands actions she wanted to bring to light. The other two were listening absorbedly also. Loko kept shaking his head as though in agreement. After a moment of this she turned and leaped from the dais and strode from the room.

The three then brought their heads together and after several seconds of talk Mita and the other also rose and departed. Loko turned his full attention to us:

"I suppose I must forego the balance of this," he said. "Matters of state have come up. Of interest to you two also. The she-devil, Luria and the rest of them will soon be in my clutches. Perhaps it is best that I save the two of you for the time when there will be other rebels and traitors to keep you company. Throw them into adjoining cells so that they might bear each other's agony. . ."

THE instant the cell door clanged shut I rushed to the bars and called to Lovah:

"All right, baby?"

"Ob, yes. But now that the ordeal is at end for you, I feel this prison. We must break loose somehow."

She had a great idea, my Lovah honey had. There was but one thing wrong with it. When Hank and I had been thrown into this clink they just

left us there. Not this time. Directly outside our doors about midway between them stood a guard against the opposite wall. And now and then I saw the shadow of a marching man pass across the outside bars of our little cages.

"I think we're stuck here for a while," I said. "But always remember that what sticks you can get unstuck."

It was small consolation but it had to do.

The sound of the warders who had brought us to our cells died away in the distance. The oddly quivering stillness of the prison settled on us. I started to turn from the bars to see what the land looked like on the outside when I saw our guard approaching. He placed his face close to the door bars and whispered:

"Loko is a traitor."

"Yeah," I said. "I know. . . ." I stopped and the light burst on me. One of Loko's own men calling him a traitor. Hope kindled anew in my breast. Lovah must have seen the man step to my cell but she couldn't hear what was being said.

"Aye," the guard said. "A deep-dyed traitor. He has lied to us. The Holy Bird has said so. I heard it. . . ."

"So?" I acted with reserve.

"It is not right. He tells the people the Holy Bird says he is the rightful ruler."

"So why don't you spill the beans. I mean speak up! Tell someone who can do something about it."

"He would have me killed," the guard said.

"Does anyone beside you know this?" I asked.

"Yes. My brother. He was with me when news of your capture came to him. He told the Holy Bird in his mean gloating voice about it. It was then we heard. Loko must have forgotten our

presence."

"Where is your brother now?" I asked.

"He will relieve me soon," the man said.

"And you in turn will relieve him?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Do you think you can bring the bird to me?" I asked.

He shook his head that he could. I smiled but his face and eyes remained grim. "Loko has gone on the field. It is said that his forces have surrounded the rightful Queen, Luria. It will be some time before he returns. I will return soon."

Nor was it long before the brother showed up. He brought with him trays of food for us. The two of them divided up the time waiting on us which amounted to their shoving the bowls into our cells and waiting until we were done. Then the first gathered up the empty bowls and went off.

I paced the cell in what seemed in endless procession until his return. He carried the bird in the open, and marched straight up to the cell, thrust the bird in on me and said:

"Loko will wonder greatly where the bird is. Nor will he know for a length of time. Perhaps by then he may find the means to escape him. Until then be at peace."

I WANTED to kiss the character.

What a sweet guy. Be at peace. It was a long time since I'd heard that phrase. I looked down at the parrot on my wrist. The blamed bird seemed asleep. Carrying carefully, I stepped out of sight of the man on the outside the cell. Our new-found friend had been careful to make the transfer during the time the outside guard was out of sight.

My bunk was below window level. I

sat down and peered at the parrot. Suddenly one eye opened and blinked several times as though brushing the sleep from its lids. Then the other eye showed life also. We regarded each other without change of expression for several seconds. The bird was the first to break silence:

"You're about the ugliest man I've ever seen," it said.

I hadn't known what to expect from it, certainly not that. I felt the heat rise all the way from my toes to my face. As if I wasn't having enough trouble, this scrawny thing had to give me more.

"Brother," I said. "Every time you open your yap, every time you crack that way, you lose ten years from your life expectancy. Now why can't you behave?"

"The truth will out," the bird said.

"Nobody asked for it," I said, my voice rising a bit.

"I was just thinking of the future," the bird said. "The day of the woman is past. Loko can't lose. My daughter can but stave off defeat for a certain length of time. The inevitable must happen. . . ."

A laugh that was as bitter as gall choked me up. For the first time since we'd come to this infernal place despair bored a hole in my breast. This bird was telling the truth and we were going to pay the consequences. My band fell and the bird hopped off my wrist and onto the bed. I saw then that its wings had been clipped. Loko thought of everything.

". . . No," it went on. "Loko can't lose. Yet oddly, he can't win. A paradox, no?"

"Who cares?" I asked.

"You do," he said. "You want to live, don't you? The girl in the cell next door; she makes life worth the struggle, doesn't she?"

I lifted my head.

"You have been beaten, whipped, wounded. All in vain? You fought back, but you lost. Now you have a valid reason for fighting. I can see through the veil of time, but because the veil is not of one thickness alone, I cannot see all the way. This I can see. A level plain bound on two sides by a forest, on the third by a river and the fourth side by a deep valley.

"Two armies are drawn up on the plain. They clash and all is confusion, all is terror and all is lost to sight because they have lost their integral distinctions. They are mixed and are one. Now they separate into distinct groups, each fighting an individual war of its own. Now from the forest comes a new force. They are mounted on paavans and they are all men. They ride, like a spearhead of fate, into the thick of the warring groups. They ride close, slash off segments of these groups and ride off before retaliation can be given. At their head rides a bareheaded man with the face of an eagle. His eyes are alight with the look of a conqueror, and his set features have the look of judgment. Now others rally around his standards. He becomes a wedge driving his sword points deep into the heart of his enemy. They scatter and flee and from all sides are beset by their opponents and chopped to bits.

"Now I see something which was not plain before. A woman and man had been the leaders before. They are no longer there. They have disappeared. I see them again and they are bound to the mounts of a fleeing couple. The woman is unconscious. . . ."

I DIVINED what he was trying to tell me. Luria and Hank. . . . I rose and slammed my fist into the wall and the grey dust powdered and flaked around my fist.

"... They are met by a company of warriors riding toward the scene of battle. Now all turn and make full speed toward the rear. And in the lead is an old man, a man I once knew full well. Loko. . ."

I bent my head:

"I've got to get out of here!" I gritted harshly. "Do you understand? I've got to get out of here! And take Lovah with me."

"Once you learned your strength," the bird said. "Have you forgotten it?"

I lifted him to my shoulders. His clawed clutch bit deep into the flesh yet I didn't notice it. I waked straight to the door and clutched with both hands at the bars. Their coldness seemed to defie me. The guard looked at me with wonder in his eyes.

"The one outside will see you," he said with apprehension.

"Open the door," I said. "We're getting out of here."

I could read the indecision in his eyes. Now I heard the shouted warning of the one at the window. He had seen the bird on my shoulder. I couldn't risk waiting. Setting my feet firmly I yanked with a sudden pull in which all my strength was exerted. There was a ripping sound as the door was pulled from the stone and I staggered backward, the weight of the metal frame in my two hands. Hurling it to one side I leaped forward to face the astonished guard.

"With us . . .?" I asked.

He made up his mind. "Yes. My brother, too. Shall I get him?"

"Yes. Quickly! But leave me your sword and open the other cell first."

Lovah flew into my arms and buried her head on my shoulders. I let her rest there for a few seconds. I could hear the hellowing voice of the man outside grow faint as he sped to spread the alarm. But we had to wait the coming of the brothers. But they did not come

alone. There were others with them, a dozen others, all armed and all willing to lay down their lives the instant they saw the bird. Lovah was given a sword, and with one of the brothers in the lead we started on the road to freedom.

"Where are we bound for?" I asked, as we ran full speed down the twisting lengths of the corridors.

"The throne room," one of the brothers replied. "Loko has returned with Luria and the stranger who came with you from the other world."

The news lent wings to our already flying feet. Then I noticed that we weren't running by the same path I'd been taken. Suspicion raised its head in my breast. As though reading my mind the one in the lead gasped:

"The other way we'd meet those coming to bar our path. This way is longer but safer."

He was right.

We rushed into the throne room from a side entrance but one that was all the way at the far end. So intent were those in the room on what was taking place before the dais, they didn't even see us. I could understand their intent.

Hank and Luria were in the same position as Lovah and I had been only a short time before. The only difference being that they were not bound together. Further, they had been made to kneel before Loko and the other two. Loko was on his feet, a look of mad fury on his wrinkled face. His arms were raised above his head and I could hear the thin screech of his voice all the way across the room:

"You will not die quickly, I promise that. I will make life drain from your bodies as the sweat labors from it on heaty days. I will have my revenge—I will make it last to your bitter end. . . . They will come too late, and seeing your lifeless bodies will give up the struggle. . . ."

HE STOPPED, warned by the shouts of the guards and the two men beside him. He took one look at us, turned and scampered backward to seek refuge behind his warrior men.

In an instant a solid wall of guards had been formed before the two captives. We hit them and it was like plowing into an immensely thick rubber band. We hit and bounced back. This time I took the lead, when we charged forward again. I swung my sword like a man swings a reaper and whatever it touched became two. My men seemed charged with the same fury as I. They hacked and stabbed with terrible effect. But once more we were too few. Reason and sanity left me. I was a wild animal. Strange sounds came from my throat. Screams of madness, shouts of delirium. Fear was plain on the faces of those facing me. For a few moments they gave before my attack, enough for me to win to the sides of the kneeling man and woman. It took just the time of two sword swipes and they were free. Then they were at my side and swinging with me.

More and more guards kept joining in the fray. We were outnumbered fifty to one. But not for long. Suddenly there were shouting voices, voices which sent echoes of "Luria" echoing about the stone walls, and from all sides warriors streamed in to join the battle, Luria's warriors.

Our opponents melted from our sight, streaming to join their leaders in flight. But not for long. We had Captain Mita and the giant who had sworn to do things to Hank and me, to reckon with. Even from my small experience in this pest-hole I knew what a maze it was. We discovered it was a perfect place for defense. Each corridor had been built with that purpose in mind. Ten men could hold back a hundred in their narrow reaches. And there were dozens of

corridors.

We had won the throne room. But we had also won to the heart of Loko's empire. We soon discovered that we had not won a complete victory. It might, we also discovered, become a Pyrrhic victory. Loko was a long way from giving up the struggle.

Ever since we had been rescued from the tented compound where we had been prisoner, I had wondered why the use of bow and arrow had not been more universal. Later I was told that they had not as yet become proficient in its use. Loko's men were. Or those he had trained. Suddenly a hail of arrows met our advancing forces. It was only fortunate that we were not in the open. As it was those barbed shafts kept us at bay. And once more it was Jimno who devised an impromptu escape from them.

"Small groups," he shouted, taking the play away from Luria as naturally as though it had been God-given. "Six and eight to each. Go low — and keep moving. Stab and go on. Don't let yourselves be targets."

As though they had been trained in the new maneuver for a lifetime, they followed the command to perfection. Now when a man or woman fell it was a single one and not as before, by fives and sixes.

But still it was hack and chop. Loko, or rather Mita, had enough sword fodder to keep us busy. I had learned a lot about the use of a sword. I no longer swung it in wild circles, hoping to catch someone in the radii. Now I jabbed and chopped. My sword and I were covered with blood. Lovah, too, was finding revenge for the indignities she'd suffered.

At last the corridor we had found ourselves in came to an end. We were on the parapet which encircled Loko's pueblo palace. Our enemies were fleeing from us. For the first time I saw a means

of escape which I hadn't seen before. Ladders had been placed against the walls. Men streamed like firemen down these ladders.

THE chase continued. But it was a little more even now. Now we were in the open where the archers had a chance at us. But they were not too proficient in the use of the bow. The arrows were indiscriminate in their choice of victims. And they found their friends as quickly as their enemies.

We won through the hail of steel. And forced our way to the ladders. Soon, each ladder had its quota of Luria's warriors in command. Nor did it take long before we were on the stretch of ground below and continuing the chase. It was only then that we learned Jimno's genius.

He had thought of everything. From above came a shrill imperious whistling. And from the great grassy plain surrounding Loko's city came a horde of paavans.

I don't know how many there were or how Jimno had gone about calling them but come they did in an irresistible wave which swept away all who opposed them until they arrived within the precincts of the city itself. Here they were met by those trying to flee. Pandemonium is a mild way of saying what followed.

But all this is what happened at the shrill calling of the paavans. What took place with us directly is as follows. We followed so close on the heels of our enemies they had no chance to cut the ladders from us. There were some who were able to but not many. Those who were on the ladders at the time, friend and foe alike, met a quick death below for the drop was all of seventy feet.

We won our way to the bottom. At our head Jimno strode like an avenging angel. I suppose the memory of what

happened to his wife and children was never to be forgotten; nor would the enemy ever forget the flashing sword which took a dozen lives for every one exacted of his. We followed close behind and chopped away after him. It seemed we were invincible. They fell as the leaves fall in the wake of a storm. They retreated until we hacked them up against a rear wall of the palace pueblo itself.

There were a hundred of them against perhaps fifty of us. The odds were even.

We paused, all together, as though drawing the last breath and strength for the ensuing struggle for it was in each of our minds that it was to be to the death. Then, as though motivated by a single being, we leaped for each other. Whether by chance or intent Hank and I were opposed by the giant and Captain Mita. Mita was my opponent.

All it took was a single stroke on my part to know that I was at the short end of a long ride. He parried my clumsy jab and had it not been for a stroke of sheer luck, the engagement would have ended then and there. His foot slid forward at the same time his sword did. But someone alongside kicked him in trying to get out of the way of a blow, and that tiny instant of break in the rhythm of his riposte, allowed his parry to slide past me, just under my shoulder.

I leaped backward to safety.

I knew then I had but a single chance. Slash and keep slashing with the utmost disregard for safety and depend on his being on the defensive all the time. Sooner or later by sheer strength I might wear him down. It sounded good in my brain. It even started off well.

I whirled my sword so fast it was but a streak of light. And, as I had hoped, he kept on the retreat. But why was he grinning? Suddenly he stepped in—

slid in would be a better way of describing the movement he made. He jabbed easily, somehow avoiding my clumsy blows. The sword tip pricked me and blood began to flow. Again and again he managed to evade my thrusts and slashes and every time he came in he departed with a little more of my blood leaking from various parts of my anatomy. He was toying with me.

After a while I began to gasp a bit. Breath was becoming harder to catch. He motioned me forward, saying:

"Come! You have only felt the tip thus far. The edge is keener, will make life depart the quicker. You have lived long enough. Soon your time will end. . . ."

TO HELL with it, I thought. A guy can live but once. And Lovah or not, if my time was now, that's the way it would have to be. I dove forward again and by sheer force broke through his guard, made him retreat. I even managed to get in a couple of digs of my own, yet he always managed to evade the death thrust.

Once more I had to stop to regain a spent breath. And saw for the first time, realized then what he had forced me into doing. He had retreated all right. But in the direction he wanted. And in so doing he had forced me to go along. Now his back was against the wall of the palace and I was in the sun. His sword danced merrily in front of my eyes and seemed to shoot sparks into them.

"You have courage, my friend," he said. "It is a pity that I have to kill you. But first I must kill that thing on your shoulder. . . ."

The bird, I thought suddenly. It was still perched on my shoulder. Its claws still dug into my flesh and for the first time I felt the bite of them. Softly to my ears came the last words of the bird,

Luria's father:

"This time death will be final for me. Tell Luria this world is done for her. And say that the world she will go to has no need of women warriors. . . ."

They were the last utterance he made. In a movement that was but a play of light, too quick for my eyes to follow, Mita brought his sword forward with a gentle but lightning-like movement of his wrist. I did my best to leap out of its way. But the blade was not seeking me. It found its mark all right. A spatter of warm liquid struck against my cheeks and from the corner of my eye I saw the head of the Holy Groana Bird fall to the ground. Then I no longer felt its claws in my shoulder's flesh. The mystery of it would never be solved now.

"So be it," Mita said. "The time has come my friend. Now!"

He danced forward and his blade flickered toward me, now toward my throat and now toward my chest but always to return as I danced awkwardly aside. But he was no longer smiling at my movements. Suddenly he snaked forward, bent a little lower than usual and shot out one leg and arm in a simultaneous gesture. I made the mistake of following the direction of his leg. . . . I don't know about this business of a drowning man seeing his life flash backward before him as he goes down. But *this* I know.

The dust of this place had a bitter taste—the sun was a blast furnace for death to enter—and the shadow—there was a voice calling to me, the voice of my beloved, and I had not the breath to answer—a pointed bit of steel was leaping to find a spot in me of the great destroyer crossed the face of the sun. . . .

My sword fell to the earth. My eyes were suddenly too tired to stay open, yet too horrified, too amazed to close.

I knew who had cast the shadow. Mokar. As though he had been shot from the blue, he had come in a tremendous leap to land full on Mita. One snap of those terrible jaws and Mita's life had escaped in a cascade of gore. Mita had spoken the truth. The time had come, *His time*.

I turned wearily. Just in time to see the last of the great drama. Loko was pinned against the wall not far from me. Hank was just stepping away from the headless body of the giant, Luria and Jimno were facing Loko, and Lovah was running toward me with the grace and speed of a gazelle.

I took her in my arms and she was limp for a second. Her fingers explored my wounds and her eyes lit up and her lips gave a sigh as she saw that I was only nicked.

We moved, arm in arm, toward the frozen tableaux.

Loko was pleading for his life, a broken stream of words which sounded oddly profane from lips which had caused so many to die. They were the sounds of a babbling idiot.

Luria was a pale-faced ghost, now that the die was cast. She saw that the bird was missing from my shoulder and at the nodding of my head knew it was dead. Her lips thinned and determination made her jaws go square.

"Throw him a sword," she said.

The blade lay at the old man's feet. He didn't even look at it. Begging words dripped from his mouth, broken-voiced promises which had no meaning. Suddenly Jimno pushed the girl gently aside, saying:

"It is not meet for a Queenly blade to be defiled. His flesh would rot the steel, tarnish its color. He is but carrion even in life. No better dead, surely. . . ."

Loko died more quickly than did most to whom he had ordered death. . . .

"LURIA," Hank was saying. "There is nothing here for you anymore. Jimno has proven a right to rule. It's better that way. . . ."

We were sitting about, the four of us, Lovah, Hank, the beautiful girl who had been the Queen, and I. Jimno was rounding up the last of Loko's forces. Lovah found the hollow of my arms and was content there.

"But my people," she protested.

"They will live and well, too," Hank said. "Jimno is wise and great. He is a poet, remember. But also a warrior. He proved that. He won his right to a kingship. Let the days of a woman's rule end."

She turned her face to his and he smiled and went on:

"Except for the rule over me. You have always been *my* Queen. In my heart you will always reign. But in my land, how much greater and more enduring will it be."

"I have the power," she said aloud. "Perhaps. . . ."

We became tense as she turned and gave us each a look of intense search. Then her lips framed a smile and she continued, "Close your eyes, all of you. And let us pray we return to that place from whence you came. . . ."

It was evening. We were in a large city. Skyscrapers were framed against the cloud-studded sky. We were not far from water. I could hear it slapping against a pier. . . . Then I saw the white wonder of the *Wrigley Building*. We were home again.

* * *

LOVAH knows what it means to be a writer's widow. A week has gone by since our return. She has wanted to go out every night. But every night I say:

"Can't honey. Got to finish this for Ray Palmer."

And always the same words from her:

"I am beginning to think you mar-

ried the wrong person. This Ray Palmer, whoever he is, is more a wife to you than I."

I grinned. Only in one way. I thought. He'd never be in any of the other ways

you are. Her arms slid around my neck. She whispered something to me, and Ray, manuscript, work, were all forgotten. Nobody cooks hamburgers like my wife. . . .

THE END

IKHNATON'S REVOLUTION

★ By FRAN FERRIS ★

THE great Egyptian Pharaoh, Amenhotep, the Magnificent, died about 1375 B.C. and was buried in the Valley of the Kings' Tombs. This great Pharaoh who presided over the splendor of the noble city of Thebes and who made his name ring in Egyptian history was not noted for what he was but rather for what he did primarily as a military strategist. At his death Egypt was a gigantic Empire consisting of Asia Minor, Egypt and Nubia. A mighty man was required to hold together this heterogeneous entity.

Amenhotep's son, Amenhotep III, more often called Ikhnaton, was the direct opposite of his father. Where his father was a bold and brave military leader, taking by force what he wanted, and seldom giving thought to anything but conquest, Ikhnaton was the philosopher, the dreamer, the idealist, the man of profound thought.

He immersed himself, not in the study of his mighty empire but in the thought of time, and he was more interested in the philosophizing of the priests than in the course of his nation. But in his way, the man is a most remarkable man among Pharaohs. We think of him as an individual, not a name before a state.

His position of prominence comes from the fact that almost single-handedly, he changed Egyptian religion. Previously, all Egyptian religion had the elementary concepts of gods presiding over given human function, for example, architecture. The god Ptah was supposed to have guided the construction of the beautiful *objects d'art* that were prepared beneath the Temple of Memphis.

But it was the belief of the Pharaoh to change this. He believed that the gods were not only the guides of such work, but the very inspirers and directors. Ptah thus became not merely the patron of the art of architecture but its very fountainhead. He was the master-workman, the architect of the Universal. All designs and all beauty stem from him. This idea met with severe opposition at first, but gradually Ikhnaton, by the magic of his personality and his oratory, swung the priests' beliefs in his direction.

NO GOD, however, had ever been claimed as the god of the Empire. Re, or Ra, god of the

Sun, was the nearest approach to that, but in some subtle sense which we do not yet fully understand, he was not the major figure. Ikhnaton identified his new god, the god of the Empire with the old Amon, the sun-god, the "Ra." He called this god "Aton, Lord of the Sun." The symbol of the god was the usual radiating disk.

Then to destroy his father's constant reference to Amon, Ikhnaton went so far as to obliterate that name as best he could from the entire city. His success was excellent. Even the sacred writings on the tombs of his ancestors were eliminated.

This done, he assigned cities in Asia, in Egypt and in Nubia to the god—they were dedicated, so to speak, to the furtherance of his worship. Because the Pharaoh's word was absolute there was little difficulty in enforcing this new god on his subjects.

So absorbed was Ikhnaton in his religious work that he almost ignored the dissolution of the Egyptian Empire. Hittite tribes from the East were beginning to worry at the flanks of the Egyptian lion and the descent of Egypt was at hand. Ikhnaton did nothing. The results were apparent at once. Charloeters swept through his empire and conquered it with little or no trouble. That is, they conquered those portions of the empire which they coveted, which fortunately was not Egypt itself.

Ikhnaton died, not in hiding for he was still a Pharaoh, but all Egypt cursed his memory and he was known as the "criminal of Akhetaton." This was a terrible appellation. Because he was an intellectual who did nothing while his world vanished about him, his people were prone to look upon him with contempt. But this much at least, may be said: he was a thinker and an idealist.

Bloody as is the history of ancient Egypt, it was and is a novelty to find anyone so concerned with the things of the spirit. As has often been mentioned, the Egyptians were almost always concerned with material gain—their spiritualistic attitude and their absorption with religious matters was merely a cover-up for their intensely acquisitive activities. Not so for Ikhnaton; he may have let an empire fall, but he at least, *thought!*

* * *

THE MIGHTY AMAZON

By H. R. STANTON

THE Amazon river in South America is the greatest one in the world. It has been called many different names by the various tribes living along their portion. It was given the name of Amazon by the explorer, Orellana, who named it after a tribe of warriors that had exceptionally large wives who helped their husbands in battles.

The full length of the Amazon is approximately 3300 miles. It varies in width, but where it enters the Atlantic it is 150 miles wide. The Amazon drains more than 2,500,000 square miles, a territory nearly as large as the United States. As the Amazon lies within a tropical zone, there is uninterrupted plant growth throughout the year. Their excessive rainy season is during our winter, and some sections have 100 inches of rainfall a year. It flows at a rate of two and one-half miles an hour, and much faster during the floods which occur each year. The Amazon and its connecting rivers form the largest system of inland water-ways in the world.

Within the basin of the Amazon there are layers of rocks and sandstone of varying height. This

shows that at one time a local mediterranean sea covered the Amazon lowland territory and its shallow outlet into the western sea gradually became filled in.

This mighty river pours five million gallons of water per second into the Atlantic ocean. Along with all this water is carried tons of sediment. Every twenty-four hours there is enough to form a solid cube 500 feet each way. During the flood season, villages, even though they are built on high posts, are practically unvisited. Natives paddle their canoes right into their houses.

Because of the hot, moist climate, there is luxuriant plant growth. Among this dense tangle of vegetation, live many practically unknown tribes. They are savage and cannibalistic. They hunt with clubs, bow and arrow, and blow-guns which shoot tiny sharp poisoned arrows that cause instant paralysis.

The plants grow uninterrupted year after year till they attain monstrous size. The enormous trees along the banks of the river are interwoven with vines and roots, and hanging with moss to create a fantastic picture.

PERUVIAN MYTH

By JON BARRY

THERE is an old legend of Collas, a Peruvian tribe, about Pacari Tampu, the "House of the Dawn." From the caverns of Pacari Tampu there came four brothers and a sister. The oldest boy climbed a mountain and threw out stones in all directions to signify that he had taken possession of the land. The other three brothers were envious of him, and the youngest brother succeeded in inducing him to enter a cave. When he was inside, he rolled a big stone in front of the mouth of the cave, and imprisoned the eldest brother there forever. On a pretense of searching for his lost brother, he had one of the other brothers climb a high mountain, from which he cast him, and as he fell, by use of black magic, changed him into a stone. The third brother sensed that there was treachery, and fled. The first brother symbolized the oldest known Peruvian religion, that of the thunder god, Pachacamac; the second, that of an intermediate fetishism or stone-worship; the third, the cult of Viracocha, the water-god; the fourth seems to be the more modern sun-worship, which in the end triumphed over all the rest, as is proved by the younger brother whose name was "Pirrbua Manca," which means "Son of the Sun."

X-RAY EYES

By PETE BOGG

THERE is a young man living in Johannesburg who seems to have x-ray eyes, for he is able to discern the presence of minerals in many places where even the experts have been in doubt. He is now employed by a South African gold mining syndicate, and his job is to search for new mining sites for them. This would be quite a task for sixteen year old Pieter Van Jaarsveld if it weren't for his x-ray eyes.

When he was taken for his first visit to a diamond mine, he became ill with a headache caused by a blue, shimmering haze above the diamond pit. No one else had ever noticed any blue haze, and they were puzzled by his words. He said he had never seen any thing just like it before, but that he had seen black ridges shimmering over a gold mine before that had given him the same kind of a headache. Several tests were made by taking the boy to mines and to prospective mines which proved that he did see phenomena that nobody else saw. Black ridges danced over ground where gold was buried, and white ridges indicated that there was water underground. But the blue shimmering haze always indicated diamonds. He has been publicized in the Johannesburg newspapers as the boy with the x-ray eyes.

Mirrors of the Queen

by RICHARD S. SHAVER

It was a simple vanishing act with trick mirrors, and Lola stepping through them—but this time she failed to return . . .

I WAS helping backstage setting up scenery when I first saw the Queen. Her real name was Lola Murphy, but her act was billed "The Golden Queen" in the Burlesque circuit.

So naturally she was "the Queen" to all the troupers, and believe me she looked the part. Do I have to tell you what queen of the strippers looks like? You don't even know? Where are you from, anyway?

She had everything, tall and perfect and young. She danced like an opium eater's dream—and she had golden, natural blonde hair to go with it—and plenty of it. The Queen would be better known today than Christine Ayres if this hadn't happened. . . . She had more, instead of languid perfection she had a dynamic rhythm, the song of life was born in her to be movement. . . . I fell!

She was headed for the top, musical comedy, movies, everything would have come her way. Agents were after her even then, but she avoided them. She wasn't figuring on a change. I sometimes think this was because of me. In fact I know it. She could have had anybody she wanted, but she took a shine to me.

I've had a little stage experience, and when the Queen found out I used to work for a magician, she had an idea.

I was spending one of my few re-

maining dollars over the "Burlesque bar" next to the Trocadero, in Philly, when the Queen took the stool next to me at the bar.

As usual when she appeared on my horizon, my eyes popped, my mouth sagged open in simple admiration and other things, so that I am just able to whisper to the barkeep: "Another Tom Collins, pal." Just as if that didn't mean I was going to be broke and out of fodder money before payday. I could tell to a meal just how far that pay check would go. And it was gone, here and now.

Then I turned on the charm, and began to unwind what meagre salam I could slice for the Queen's benefit.

"I'm Frank Marr, Demon Magician, master of illusion and apparition. You never knew that, did you, Lola?"

"I did not. But there are a few things I could learn yet. You might even have money to pay for these drinks, but I'll have to see it to believe it."

Uneagerly I shelled out my last remaining bit of well worn cabbage. Queenie laughed. I said—"Well, a guy don't make much moving scenery and sweeping out . . . if I was in the dough like you, it'd be different."

The Queen sort of measured me with an eye.

"I see. At liberty, one magician. Why didn't you say so?" The queen



She stood with her lovely arms raised over her head, looking like a golden goddess . . .

put my money back in my hand, and paid the bar-keep. She was sharp.

"You're not much of a magician, or you'd have more money. When did you work last? I mean aside from that bums relief job of yours?"

"It *has* been quite a while."

"I could get you a job with us. You could fill in while we change, etc. A magician is always good. I'll speak a word, and you come in after the show and we'll see what you can do. It don't have to be too good. You don't stutter, do you? I know you're not too proud!"

"NNNNooo," I stuttered.

SO IT began, and I burlesqued a stage magician very well. My clumsiness and inexperience the audience thought was put on, and it went off fine. But The Queen wasn't fooled.

I was young, and being around pulchritudinous, broadminded females was seventh heaven. I ate regularly, and spent a lot of my time watching doors for Lola, watching her on the stage, getting a chance to talk to her in the wings.

Pretty soon I was that way about Lola, and everybody knew it, including her. She had a big heart, and never put me in the place I probably belonged, so far as she was concerned. That's what I thought, before I learned she cared.

Everything was jake, my act was funny if not clever, and Lola advised me as to how to better it. If I had left well enough alone, I'd still be a trouper, instead of telling this sad story. And it *is* sad!

But I got a bright idea. I devised an improvement on the gazeeka box, and I called it "The Fountain of Youth."

The gazeeka box is an old standby of burlesque. It has a trick bottom, it looks like a coffin. You put someone

inside, then you close the door, say Presto, open the door and there either is nobody there, or there is someone else there. Which is surprising enough, but everyone has seen it, and no one is surprised. Which I decided to remedy.

I rigged a trick fountain of chemical mist. There were mirrors and such things, and when somebody stepped into the fountain they disappeared. Or they could appear out of nowhere right in the fountain, and it was very pretty.

The way I worked it, an old lady walked into the fountain and disappeared. After a second, out stepped the pretties of our chorus girls in sheer net, did a little dance of naked joy, and pranced off the stage. "*The fountain of youth*"—and we had a swell bally-hoo which made it all very impressive.

"Frank," says Lola, first time we worked the new act—"it needs something. After the girl comes out, put somebody else in, and have a monster come out—something goes wrong, see?"

"That's funny, Queen. The magician I used to work for had an old book that mentioned a spell that was supposed to do just that—you put in something and a kind of little monster appeared. I copied the spell out of the book, meaning to try it some time—just for fun, you know!"

"You don't seriously *believe* in such things, do you?"

"I don't, but there *was* something funny about that old book. Black Harry, the magician, never let me read it. He had a couple of books he never let anyone see. Why? What could a book do wrong?"

"Lots of people have books they are ashamed of. What's funny about that?"

"Because I hooked this one, and I remember that spell because I copied it out of the book before I put it back. That book was plenty peculiar!"

"Never mind such nonsense, Frank. Just work up the act like I tell you. If it's good enough we might get a chance at big time—I'll help you put it over tonight."

If I had only let it go at that! But I wasn't even listening to her. I was thinking of some of the stunts Black Harry used to do that even I couldn't figure out. I was thinking of that book—so old it didn't even have a cover or flyleaf. So old, in black letters on thin parchment paper—and on the top of each page—the legend "Genuine Magic."

THAT night I looked up the pages I had copied out of the ancient book. I copied down again the words that had caused my curiosity.

"In the Tyme of Artour King, there was an Elf Queen called the Golden. Olden magick had she, and this spelle of potencie is hers. She tooke five mirrors, and put them in the pentacle. She did so put them that the morwenings light tangled a web of planings litten thrice, from each to one and back. Within the magick star of light she did cause to appear, by cunning turning of mirror facen, a black hole out of night itself.

"In that awful hole it was her evil custom to cast her enemies. From that hole she gotten gold and silver and gems, and outen that hole came monstrous little men to serve her.

"Those she threw in came back no more. Yet outen that hole she tooke much, all her fancy did demand, for the wights beyond did serve her.

"This awful spelle she did give to one magickon. Himsel' written it down thus, and to another, and at last to me. Herein I do print it. Thaumaturgists know such things may not go lost, here it is.

"Five by five and three yards distan'

each reflecting over each and under each, down each middle the flaren slicen; so slicen each the other trained and turned till—the dread black star appears between.

"Then heware, and bid goodhye what goes in thare!"

I got two more mirrors out of the stock room, and set them up behind the screen with the other three to form each one side of a star—the "pentacle". The other sides I did not even draw upon the floor, letting the reflected light do that. Why? Why does anybody do anything? Because I was interested in that old book and its deadly serious attitude toward magic—one couldn't read it and think it was all foolishness. Yet in truth I did not think I was doing anything but making a wider opening for the disappearance of the woman from the chemical mist of the "fountain". I turned on the spot for the "light flare slicen" and turned each of the mirrors till the main light made a line of repetition down the center of each. Then I stood back, to see just what I had. At first it didn't appear to be anything, but as I moved about, my shoulder nudged one of the mirrors, and instantly in the center of the mirror arrangement appeared a wide black space. A place where no light entered—a shadow; deep and sinister it looked, too.

I was startled, but still didn't realize that there was anything remarkable about a mere shadow caused by reflection of a light.

I didn't realize that mirrors, by a concentration of many lines of force, could so distort or work upon the tenuous webs of space itself as to cause to project into three dimensions something that was distinctly not of our three dimensions, but of a higher or a lower number. To me it was a peculiar illusion, similar to many such tricks em-

ployed by magicians, and the ancient authority for its potent nature I took most lightly of all. Or did I? Who knows truly what goes on in the hidden portions of his own mind?

I passed off the black space as a mere coincidence of shadow lines from the mirrors, switched off the spot, and left for a dinner date with Lola. I forgot all about it till the show opened that night. We didn't need to rehearse even a new act, we ad libbed whenever we didn't know what came next, and the audience at a burlesque show is never critical.

AS I stood that night in front of a half-filled house for the first show, a vague dread of that waiting black web of darkness stretched between the five mirrors began to bother me. Could it be that simple three dimensional space could be converted by simple repeated light force dynamically reflecting over and over—distorted into a weird path between adjacent worlds of space-time? I brushed away the silly fears, and went into my spiel, while out of the wings shuffled old Mary, the derelict we had hired to play the part of the aged creature converted by the "Fountain of Youth" into a young chorus girl.

Behind the shimmering mist of chemicals spraying upward, I could see that black star-shaped web of light force spread like a great spider, five feet tall and five-armed, big in the center as a man's body.

Old Mary, inobedience to my motions and my words—"Presto, age becomes youth! Abra and cadabra and OOM himself will take away this shriveling mask and give you once again the glory of youth. Enter the Fountain!"—advanced to the center of the mist. I pressed the foot button that caused the mist to shoot higher, it's con-

cealing screen of coiling mist, white and thick and eery.

Now, while the audience could not see beyond the mist, I could; and Mary ducked backward into the center of the mirror arrangement, expecting to feel Trixie Benson, the smooth little number who played the part of the rejuvenated Mary, brush by as she stepped into the center of the mist.

It was as pretty an act as there was on any Burlesque stage, which are not usually noted for complex or artistic work, and I waited impatiently, not wanting Trixie to spoil the effect by coming on late as she had before. But my eyes were telling me that both of them were there in that black star of shadow behind the fountain, for neither of them had left. I should have seen Mary's back retreating behind the curtain to the wings, and should have seen Trixie's young curves within the mist, but neither of them had come through that black star on either side!

I waved my hands and let up on the hidden foot pedal of the mist spray, hoping Trixie had gotten in place in the center—but no Trixie. I stepped on it again and the white coils shot up high, as I intoned—"Obdoolah, Geniurkim, EEniequey, oodey, omesingsay!"

Meaning "Queenie, do something, for Pete's sake!" She was the only one watching the act from the wings, there wasn't anyone else to appeal to. No-one else give a darn.

How did I know a fool like me would stumble onto genuine ancient magic? I still didn't believe anything was wrong except that Trixie wasn't in her place. Which was not unusual.

Queenie came striding out, her long lovely legs making poetry beneath a white wooly coat she always put on when she came off after a dance. I let up on the mist, the fountain died down

to a foot high, looked at it—exclaimed in stage surprise: "The old lady has disappeared!"

Queenie took me up, looking into the mist, and screaming—"She's gone. You've gone and done it, you bumbling magician! Bring her back here."

Queenie was acting for the audience, but I wasn't so sure I was acting.

Which was all very well, but while the Queen and I peered and acted surprised and waited for Trixie to show behind the mirrors, a little man walked calmly out from the black web of shadows.

The Queen screamed and nearly fainted in my arms, the audience howled with laughter. I just stared at the little gremlin. It wasn't that he was so small. It was the angular dark gloomy naked body of him, like an african carving of a savage God, the malevolent stare of the deep set eyes . . . He turned around and went back into the web between the mirrors.

THE audience began to clap. It must have been effective all right. But wasted on that audience, so far as saving what stage craft it must take to do a thing as real as that!

My knees were knocking together. I stood there nonplussed, or fear-stricken, but the Queen thought I was having stagefright, I guess, for she took over.

"Now don't worry, Frank. I'll get the little man back and ask him where is the little old lady?"

Before I could stop her she stepped into that fountain, and I had automatically stepped on the lever to make the mist rise and bide her disappearance. I took my foot off, but just in time to see her half way through the wall of black nothing that edged the star of shadow behind the mist-fountain. Half in and half out—and cut off as clean as a knife—and the next in-

stant she was gone!

Through my head rang the antique words of the rhyme from the book:

"Them she throwed in came outen ne'er!"

For bid good-bye what goes in there!"

Before I could do anything but press my two fists to my temples trying to think—two more of the little men walked out of the shadow and glared at me. They were not anything a man could look at and fully grasp. Small and strangely angled bodies, like alien carvings, or surrealist paintings, they struck a sensing of vast alien dimensions into me that even the departure of the Queen's lovely self had not done.

Sandra Uvald, Lola's best friend and herself a talented stripper and fine looking woman, came running out on the stage. The uproar was deafening, with a third of the audience on their feet, shouting incoherently.

I couldn't hear what Sandra said, but I could guess. I bent my head to her lips, she shouted: "What's going on, anyway? Where's Trixie? She went behind the mirrors and never came out on this side or the other!"

I bellowed, "That's nothing! Did you see the gremlins that came out?"

Sandra looked at me as if I was crazy. I decided maybe she was right. The audience shouted and clapped and whistled and stomped. Sandra had on only a gaudy red dressing gown thrown over her rhinestone G-string and net halter.

"Take it off, Sandra. Take it off!" the boys shouted, whistling happily, unaware entirely of what was going on.

Sandie looked at the noisy crowd, that had been filling up steadily since the show began. She smiled and held up her hand. A dead silence fell, because the regulars there practically worshipped Sandra and Lola the Queen.

That clear sugary voice of hers rang eerily to me, but I suppose it sounded fine to everyone else.

"Friends, a strange thing has happened. This magician has caused three people to disappear, vanish—pouf! And he can't tell where they are or get them back!"

They all started laughing, for they thought naturally she was kidding. She went right on above the laughter: "Little Sandra is going into the Fountain of Youth to see what happened to the help! Hold my coat, Frank."

She tossed the vivid red gown, satin thing that made me think of blood, into my arms and the audience howled as she turned once with her arms raised, glorious smooth flesh perfectly molded—and stepped, alive, vital—into that thing that I called the Fountain of Youth and now realized must be only a door to death.

I TRIED to stop her, my mind giving me shudders of self recrimination—"If only I had told them all what I was doing, if only I hadn't kept it to myself!"

Sandra was only trying to help me out of a situation she saw was going to reflect badly on me, perhaps lose me the new job I was so proud to have made good in. She didn't realize at all what she was stepping into. . . .

The audience bellowed at my acting as I tried to stop her.

Graceful as a Goddess, she eluded me, sliding past my outstretched hands with a dancing step—slid into the mist as easily as a wraith. I was sure she was going to be one. The last I saw of her was one glorious nude leg and rhinestone glittering strip around her dimpled hip—and the rest of her sliced off by the black star's edges. And it wasn't any mirror effect, the mirrors were behind that black reaching place

between. It was the focus of the light planes where they formed a multi-sided figure in space, a star shaped polyhedron of force line and plane of light re-enforced by reflection and re-reflection until they formed the insupportable strain on the matrix of our own space-time that caused that other world adjacent to touch in reality of solid substantial simultaneity. Was it synchronized vibrance caused by the repeated light impact? Was it space-tortion set up by the light flow's repetition? Was it truly ancient magic I was witnessing—something no man can understand but only guess at?

I was yelling to the vanished Sandra—"No! No! That's the fourth dimension, you can't go in there!"

The audience was laughing fit to kill, and I stopped, feeling just as ludicrous and impotent as they thought I was acting.

There was only one thing to do. My heart contracted as if frozen, my skin broke out in cold sweat, and I stripped off my coat as if about to plunge into water. Something inside me seemed to be shrilling to me—"You fool dabbling in magic has cost you the finest woman you will ever know. You might as well jump in too, you won't enjoy life now!"

I took my tottering courage in my hands and stumbled after Lola and Sandra, through the mist, into the utter blackness of that star-shaped space between the five facing mirrors. What else could a man do who knew that Lola's heart was just as big as her sweet smile made you think it was?

Strange, vibrating energy shook my body. My eyes saw whirling planes of light, vast sweeps of peculiar mixtures of light planes endlessly reflecting, and my feet sank softly into some strange stuff that was not matter as we know it. I stumbled over a body, and lay there for a long time, unconscious.

Then I came to, my vision cleared, I got up and staggered on through the mists until a wind blew it all away and I saw—a Gremlin city!

Those angular little hobgoblins coming and going, their endlessly piled impossible houses of faceted ugly, illogically assembled humps and rounds and angles of smeary brown plaster construction.

The far mountains reached toward a sky that was not azure, but black. A sky that was only one vast hole in space, and here and there hung dizzily spinning pinwheels of fire. Not stars, nebulae, I guess—but close and big and spinning with visible motion!

I took a step and shouted with sudden fear. For I was sailing end over end through the sticky ill-smelling air. As I floated slowly down, I saw awaiting me a net in the hands of a dozen angular ugly little men, their malevolent eyes waiting for me with every possible evil glee expressed in them. Or so it seemed to me then.

THEY carted me off easily, though it took all of them to do it—and dumped me through the door of one of the peculiar “bouses” which I only guessed were houses because there was nothing that looked more like a house in evidence.

As I struggled out of the net, beside me I heard Lola, saying: “So you’re here! At last! Now, would you please explain just what this is all about before I go crazy?”

I looked up at her beautiful and distraught face. She never looked better to me. I sighed, and murmured, “You won’t like it if I do, Lola!”

“You’d better. I can kick your teeth in before you get out of that net! You’d better do some explaining. . . .”

“It all began with that old book that old Black Harry told me not to read.

That’s what did it! Did anybody ever tell you *not* to read a book?”

“I see. Now you wish you hadn’t! Go on!”

“Well, there were lots of ancient things in the book, stuff nobody can understand now-a-days. But that magical experiment it described was a method of creating with light reflections a doorway into what it called “night.” It must be a higher-dimension! I rearranged the mirrors behind the Fountain of Youth so that they were like the diagram in the book. And here we are!” I concluded, unwrapping the last of the net from about my ankles.

“That explains a lot to you, but it doesn’t help me, not a little bit. What are we going to do about it? Did it ever occur to your infantile mind that you were monkeying with first class danger of a higher order of dynamite? Did that bird brain of yours never think of the consequences?”

“Well, you see, Queen, I didn’t expect it to work. I was going to test it with some inanimate object first. But it took me so long there wasn’t time before the show. And the old lady came out and walked in before I could even think of stopping her. Besides, I was curious. Besides, I didn’t believe in it.”

“Yes, yes, but what are we going to do? That show is going to turn into a riot if we don’t get back!”

Lola began to pace up and down the long, narrow, peculiarly angled room like a panther in a trap. I sat down, my whole mind engaged—but *not* with the problem of the fourth dimension. Oh no! The light effects upon the subtle nude planes of Lola’s perfect body, fully revealed in that entirely brief costume of rhinestones and net and queenly satiny skin. That’s what I was thinking about! Time ticked by, Lola paced, now and then striking her hands

together or pressing her palms against her temples as if her head would burst. I could feel the mental conflict she was going through, but strangely, I wasn't built that way. I felt myself somehow like a sailor marooned on a tropical island with a beautiful girl—wonderful! I was alone at last with—"The Queen!"

Suddenly that three-cornered impossible door slid open noiselessly, and another net full of thrashing human plumped in upon the rough brown greasily shining floor. From the blue suited figure inside came loud snorts and at last loud curses—"Dad blamed the ding-danged crazy world. What in the name of impossible God is going on anyway? Judas priest and all the little priest. . . ."

Lola and I stood side by side, watching the contortions inside the net. Suddenly the folds unfolded and out thrust the sweating face of . . . a cop. a cop.

"Dan!" Lola knew him. She knew everybody. "Dan Daniels! How did you get here?"

"I'm asking you, Queenie. How did I get here. Your pal, Finkelstein the manager, rushes out to me where I'm standing perfectly at peace with the world and tells me four people disappeared in the "Fountain of Youth." Well, I knew what the Fountain of Youth was, and I figured you and Frankie had thought up a royal ribbing for the house and all concerned . . . a new stunt of some kind. I rushes on, wanting to do my part for you, Queen, like any man would that was a man, and here I am! NOW magician, suppose you do a little talking. Or do I wrap this little used night-stick around your head until you do? I'm not a man can be made a fool of, not when I'm conscious! And I ain't drunk, Frankie the Magic-man, I ain't drunk. So give with some information!"

I TOLD him the truth, just as I had the Queen, and Dan the cop sat there with the net draped like a sarong around his hips and his uniform and looked at me.

"If I wasn't here in nowhere land I'd run you in as a dangerous psychopathic. As it is, I guess we'll let it pass. But mind you, I don't believe it! I'm just biding my time."

Dan Daniels completed his unwrapping and then, like me, gave himself up to serious contemplation—not of the peculiar things that might be seen through the window over our heads, not to speculation as to the wonderful things that might befall us here in nowhere—but to the subtle undulations of Queenie's near-nude body as she resumed her nervous pacing up and down. "Even in the fourth dimension," I murmured.

"Even what?" asked Queenie.

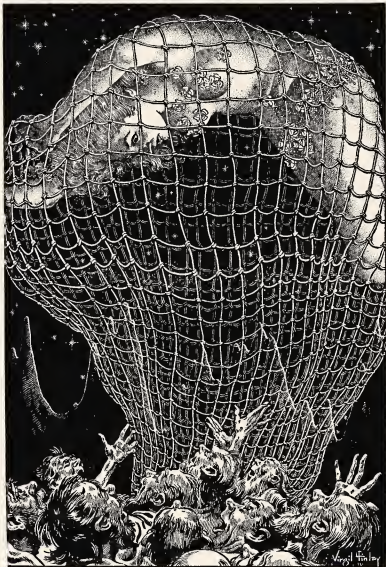
"Even in the fourth dimension, man is man and beauty rules him," I concluded, and the Queen snorted. She was too used to being stared at to notice two mere malese who could not take their eyes off her.

"What became of Trixie and Sandra? Yes, and the old lady?" asked Lola.

"Yeah, there was supposed to be four or five of you. And there's only two!"

"Two's enough!" I ejaculated, refusing to consider any further complexities of life. I had finally torn my eyes away from Queenie's strip-tease undress, and began to clamber up the rough wall toward the window over our heads. I looked down, and a dizzy nauseating sensation swept over me. I let go and floated down to the floor. I sat down, holding my head.

"Now what's the matter? Can't you stand the sight of the little people?" asked Dan.



"Look for yourself," I groaned.

Dan clambered easily up the rough surface, which seemed to lean outward at a seventy degree angle with the horizontal.

"Geez, Frankie, what do you call it? I never seen nothing like it! Am I looking straight down or straight up or what?"

"I don't know, Dan, but don't fall out! You'd never stop . . ."

I didn't finish. From outside somewhere began to come a fiendish caterwauling, the piping of unearthly flutes and horns, the steady rhythmic beat of myriad feet.

The door flew open and the noise thrust into the weird shaped chamber like an unwelcome and drunken guest. Lola peered out. I peered out, bending to look under Queenie's bare, smooth and heavenly arm. Dan peered out, and cursed.

Along the astounding causeway, which hung along the far weird city like an ugly snake caught by spiderwebs, came a procession.

All the little ugly men, dressed now in glittering paraphernalia and ornaments, ornaments that somehow in spite of the attempt at decoration yet looked like many crushed and bright tin cans strung on strings and wound about their angular, bumpy bodies—were marching in procession. At the head of the procession danced three weirdly decorated and painted Grem-lins, rattling great square drums full of pebbles, I guess. Masks on their faces made far worse than nature had intended, grimacing mouths from ear to ear, horns; and tails of flopping brown, greasy feathers—everything here seemed to be brown and dirty with grease—or was it the strange light from the blazing, whirling, too-close unborn stars; glowing, spinning clouds overhead—that made every-

thing appear so filthy?

Straight up to our door came the procession's head, and the three dancing homunculi came straight in upon us, began to motion us out the door with motions of the big square rattles. As if we were fowl or cows, to be driven by fright at the sounds of the rattles.

I GOT the idea, walked out the door, stood waiting for the other two. They lined up beside me, and the procession followed us as we shuffled awkwardly along, trying to keep our balance and our dignity where every unwary step sent us four feet into the air.

That causeway twisted and slanted this way and that, seeming to follow the tug of an unearthly gravity, for we remained upright even when it seemed the landscape itself was vertical. I knew no man could know the planes or differences of this world, or know that these creatures, so like ourselves in some ways, and so unlike in others—could not be four-dimensional creatures. It had come to me now that we were not really in the fourth dimension, but that the light-cube door I had created had merely made two adjacent worlds touching in the folds of the fourth dimension be simultaneous instead of only adjacent. Had somehow created a path between two worlds ordinarily separated by the un-understandable vagaries of irregular fourth dimension form. That the negligible force of the reflecting rays of light yet had power to create such a path was impossible but true! Perhaps it was like a match, small in itself, yet the flame from one match can burn down a whole city—or a forest. The vibrations of constantly rebounding light, reflecting itself over and over in a repetitive re-enforcing of some ancient

pattern of known mystic potency—of awful wisdom from the past which knew the innermost secrets of space and time and matter—Somehow *did* build up such a strain on the ordinary fabric of space as to cause about themselves an opening, a break-through along fourth dimensional force planes between adjacent worlds. . . .

I gave up, and let my eyes follow the serpentine winding of the impossible roadway hung by the spider-web thin strands of cable from the points of the houses—queer, many-angled structures which seemed supported themselves by some unsubstantial mass of brown, heaving matter that anyone could see would not support one's weight. A city sitting on mud, it was; queer brown bateful appearing stuff, wet and glistening—and the paths from house to house and to the wide twisting cable-bung road all suspended above the mud that yet supported those buildings.

The big central building, the palace of the king, I suppose it was to them; was the center of many of these cable-hung roads, like the center of a vast web. In the big triangular doorway we went, and after us came the procession, the rattle-shaking leaders, the gloomily tramping, ornamented host trailing behind, their little faces and long noses and their thin ugly lips twisted all into a mean expression of waiting malevolence.

"You know," said Dan, "if I had been invited I wouldn't have come. I never felt so unwelcome in my life!"

I whispered, "Pretend to like whatever happens, no matter how hard it is. That's the best advice I can give you. I used to study psychology. If you can seem to be on their side—O.K. But if they get the idea we don't like them—look out!"

"Keep smiling, eh?" asked the Queen,

and I nodded.

She put on her best stage teeth-exposing grimace and kept it there. She knew how! On her it looked swell. On me I knew it must look awful, but I kept grinning. Did it help? That gloomy crew never lifted an eyebrow or twisted a lip. The same unsmiling gloom and mean, unanimous, sullen expression.

I couldn't have felt more alone, as far as they went, if I had been marooned on a desert island.

THE king was a caricature, a gnome out of a story book; a thin, long faced little man with narrow shoulders, pot belly, long jeweled fingers, drumming on the carved wood of the throne. His crooked shins were bare, and a pair of bangled knickers which reached nearly to his armpits was his sole costume, aside from armlets aglitter with gems, and an iron collar around his neck. His staff of office was ivory, white and gleaming, a polished bone that looked horribly reminiscent of its one time place in life as a human thigh-bone.

He glowered down at us, probably wondering what he was going to say to people who wouldn't know what he was talking about. I broke the uncomfortable silence by smiling as engagingly as I could, and Lola giggled nicely, but her arm against mine felt as cold as marble.

Dan decided not to be left out, and boomed: "Greetings to you! Just what do you want with us, anyway?"

At the feet of the monarch something stirred and I noticed what their immobility had concealed before—the King's women. I hadn't been sure before, because of their uniform ugliness, just which were male and which female, but now I knew I was gazing upon the selected beauties of the King's harem,

stretched about his feet in what may have been supposed to be a languorous adoration—and one of them stretched her face up on a thin boneless neck and the King leaned forward to hear. Then he gave a kind of bark that may have been a guffaw, though you weren't able to tell, and the girl—thin, angular and mud brown and completely ugly—though her face was smooth and not bumpy, her skin clear and smooth on her bare shoulders and prominent buttocks—got up and approached us.

Waist high she stood, before the Queen, who is a good five eleven in her heels, and she always has heels. Lola smiled upon her with all the benevolence of a Venus, and for me, with quite as devastating an effect.

Then the girl really surprised me. She began to whisper: "I learned your language from the other two, the old one and the young one. They came through the magic fountain long, long ago. They said that sometime soon the magician who had sent them would come for them. I believed them, but you never came. I learned the language so that I could go back with you. Will you take me?"

If I had been unconscious with surprise before, now I really was stunned. I said: "You learned the language from two who came through long ago! But nobody came through long ago . . . it was only minutes ago!"

"You are Demon Frank, Magician, aren't you?"

Her pronunciation was poor, but plain enough . . . weakly I nodded my head. "I guess!"

"Then your friends came here years ago. We have awaited your coming with great interest. Now you will take me back with you!"

"It's all right with me. Just show me the place we came in!"

"I will do that, but not now. Soon!"

She turned away, held up her thin ugly hand, began to harangue the formal line-up of the Gremlins with a series of word-sounds that no recording machine could have held in a groove. After minutes of this, we were led to a place before the throne, and squatted down in a line with several Gremlin dignitaries squatting on each side.

A KIND of pageant or dance was performed, through which we sat. The procession which had led us to the palace wound and jumped, shook their rattles, nodded their heads, shuffled their feet, in and out and round and round until I was dizzy and nauseated not alone with the motion but with the peculiar muddy smell of sweat and wet, evil air.

Queenie whispered, "What is she talking about, the two who came before years ago?"

"Everything is crazy here, Lola. Time as well as space is different here. While we monkeyed around on the stage for a minute or two before following "She" through the fountain time itself was rushing along here in the next adjacent world with no connection with our own time rate at all. Seconds there seem to be months here . . ."

"Then how did Dan arrive within such a short time?"

"Doesn't mean a thing. When I came through, the shock was so great I passed out. I may have lain unconscious for what was years here, but only a few minutes back in our world—lain or stood or fell—for long minutes—years here, still on the borderline between the worlds. Then I came through, slid or fell into this world."

"I stopped too, the strange lights and electric shock, the waves of energy beating at me . . . I stopped for a long pause, afraid to go on . . ."

"Exactly. And years passed here

while we were pausing between the worlds. Dan rushed right on through, rescue bent . . ."

"Yeah, that's right. I did! But how did you know?" Dan had begun to listen in.

"That's what we're talking about! The funny looking skinny friend, the king's girl friend, said the other two came through long years ago. We were just figuring out where we were all that time."

"Years! What are you talking about?"

"Never mind. I'll explain it all when we get back." I didn't want to miss a trick here in this court. Too much depended on understanding this place and these fiend-faced small ungainly people to stop to argue about the relative motions of separate time-flows with a cop.

The redundant circling of the Grem-lin court led to a climax—a thunderous booming of drums—shaking of rattles, and shrill screams, a rhythmic repeating chant lending a background to it all. At the peak of the furious dance, the dancers began one by one to strip off their ornaments and cast them at the Queen's fair feet!

I looked at Queenie. The pile of glittering gew-gaws grew and grew. As each dancer took off the bangles and tossed them on the heap, he backed away from the Queen with his head bent low, finishing by falling to his knees far enough away to let the others pass and make their contribution. Soon we were surrounded by these kneeling suppliants and protected by a barrier of ornaments.

I picked up one of the heavy strings of bangles, objects the size of a baseball and surprisingly hefty, considering the gravity reduction here. The thing was either alloyed silver or gold, it was too bright-colored for lead. Set in the metal were semi-polished gems, big as mar-

bles. I looked at Queenie.

"I don't know what these guys mean by this, Lola, but if I'm right, you have several million dollars worth of raw gold and crude jewels there in front of you. Just what are they throwing the stuff at you for?"

Even as I asked, the words of the old rhyme rang in my head, echoing down from an antiquity I could only guess at:

"There was an Elf queen called the Golden,

In that hole it was her custom,
To cast her enemies and her victims,
And to get back gold and silver and gems—

For monstrous little men came out to serve her!"

AN IDEA came to me, and I beckoned to the thin brown girl who had gone back to the feet of her king. She rose and walked toward me, her head bobbing toward the Queen.

"Why do they give these to the Queen?" I asked her, pointing to the pile of precious hardware.

"She is the answer to an ancient prophecy among us. From the land of the immortals, the Golden One will come again. She is the Golden Queen of the legend, whom the Dryne used to serve in the other world. To them she is an immortal."

"The girl's answer was clear enough. They took Lola Murphy for the same Elf Queen who had long ago used the mirrors to make a place to throw people she didn't like. The time was so different between the worlds that a person on earth probably lived a hundred of the lifetimes here in this crazy mixed up geography. So they would seem immortal, it would be called the world of the immortals. And these weird little people were called the Dryne. I was learning.

"What were the customs of this leg-

endary Queen? What did she do here, how did she go back?" I asked the girl, nervously hoping for some clew to a course of action which would place us on top.

"Much is forgotten, it has been so long. Only do we know that in the days of our forefathers the Golden Queen came through, and held festival for days—then went back to her world. That is all anyone could tell you."

I turned to Lola. "There it is, Queen. You dance for them, talk to them, get them to join in and loosen up, get them good natured—and back we go with a load of jewels."

"It might be a good idea to sell them a little flesh worship, at that. It might be worth a life or two . . ." Lola smiled at me. "Not that I care about anyone here . . ."

Lola stood up, raised her lovely arms, letting the brief wooly coat slide off to the pave. Here, contrasted with the Dryne's skinny, outrageously ugly bodies; the smooth glorious rounds and muscled planes of her perfect figure stood out in a beauty unperceived even by me before. She was a Goddess, here, and to these people, an immortal. She said several words, not meaning to be understood, but as an opening for the dance she began. It was one of those slow, creepy dances; where the dancer seems to invoke some unseen presence—I could tell that Lola had chosen it to give the impression of contact with the world we had just left behind. Posturing, slowly moving her limbs and bending back the perfection of her columnar torso to reveal all the muscled ivory beauty, she built up there in that impossible, horrible court a vision of the worship of unseen beauty—even while she built up by the language of gestures the impulse to worship beauty among the Dryne. Her beauty! She spoke of it with every

trick known to dancers, with every burlesque bump and sensual shiver mingled with a knowledge of true dramatic dancing. And the Dryne watched with their gloomy, wide-gashed mouths open and drooling, their beady eyes aglitter with desire. As she climaxed the dance with a spread arm gesture, they fell to their knees in unison as at a command—and I whispered to the Dryne girl still waiting beside our group.

"Announce her as the Golden Queen of old time, come again to her friends, the Dryne, to bring wisdom and pleasure to them, to open again the pathway between the worlds so that both we and they might profit. Make it good, and I will get you what you want—a trip back with us."

IN THE silence, the girl began to chant in the squeaky, raspy language of the Dryne, a monotonous repetition of several phrases over and over. What she said, I don't know—but for the first time the gloomy faces lit up with a half-hearted smile, and the heads nodded agreement right and left.

"Now tell them we must go back to arrange for their wishes to be granted, and that we will return to them with gifts to startle them with our gratitude for these gifts they have made our Queen."

The thin little brown girl spoke again, and I wondered at the response, the furious shaking of heads in the negative, the discussion that soon rose in a high ear-splitting gabble everywhere. They did not want Lola to leave—not ever.

The King, who had watched the dance with particularly greedy eyes, now stood up and held up his hands to quiet them. He began to talk, furiously and at length.

When he was through the brown girl translated to me.

"This stranger woman must not rule us again as she did in the old time. We rule ourselves, and no one or nothing can say to us: go and come, I leave or I stay. She shall be my woman, and slave here with my other wives like any common woman. We will not let these people go but kill them in the sacrifice as we have always done. We have waited too long. Let the death rites begin!"

Even as the girl finished her translation the three hanged priests and several others had sprung forward, producing nets from about their wrists, others were running toward us with larger nets. We were about to be made helpless again. I looked about in desperation, my wits racing, seeking an opening in circumstance. At Dan's belt hung his police revolver.

"Dan, there's only one thing, a miracle! You've got to shoot the king, or we're done for. Quick, man, the king . . . with him dead, Lola will be the Queen again!"

Dan, not understanding, still saw the nets in the air over our heads, falling slowly as did everything here.

He tugged out the gun. Sighting with what seemed to me ridiculous care and much too long, he blasted at the King, once, twice. The King stood there, looking at us in a terrified surprise, stood—and suddenly the blood ran out of his mouth, he pitched forward on his face, rolled grotesquely down the steps of the dais.

"Get on that throne, Queen," I yelled. "Get up there and act like a Queen, or else you'll be darn sorry!"

Gracefully eluding the nets now almost upon us, Lola strode to the throne, mounting the dais without more than a scornful glance at the dead body. She knew what I meant, had not missed a single nuance of meaning about her. Standing there proud and triumphant

and regal, she raised her hands for silence, and spoke.

"My people, your king did not understand the benevolence I mean toward you. He caused his death by defying my magic. Now remember hereafter who is the Queen and your ruler, or you too will have to die as he has!"

After her glorious, ringing tones, the dull grey monotone of the translator rose shrilly explaining what she had said. As she finished, the Queen gestured to the girl, and as she approached, placed her arm about her in affection.

"Thank you very much, little one. What is your name?"

"My name is Normea, O Queen."

"Then announce that hereafter you are the second in importance here, and your words are my words until you cause my displeasure. I am grateful to you."

* * *

THAT was the most astounded audience that ever sat in the worn seats of a Burlesque theatre—when we came through. Although we had been in that screwball world for what seemed at least a week's time, (and Sandra, who had never reached there at all, swore she had been suspended in a grey colud for years) while Trixie and the old woman Mary swore they had lived for years in the quarters of the King's women—here on the stage of the Troc it was only some twenty minutes later. There was just no correlating time and the fourth dimension so far as I could see—if it was the fourth.

Two comedians had rushed out after my disappearance in the fountain and began a furious distraction to cover the disastrous mystery of the Mirrors behind the fountain.

They were still at it, chasing each other, trying to take the clothes off a chorus girl, slapping each other around,

and getting off their whole bag of gags while Feinstein and the cops who had come to answer his insistent phoning searched the back stage and dressing rooms, all to no avail.

We stepped out of the fountain right between the two comedians, and the big fat one fainted dead away.

No wonder, for each of us was carrying an arm load of wired together trinkets, and each of us was followed by a little gremlin also loaded down with jewelry.

I dumped my load of glittering junk in the center of the stage, and Sandra and Lola took up positions on each side. Dan stood in line with them, and Mary and Trixie did not stop, but ran right off the stage crying and sobbing with frantic relief.

I started spieling, why I don't know—but someone had to explain the weird appearance of the dozen little men who had followed us through, had to explain the little knob heads that peeked out of the fountain and shyly ducked back, only to be replaced by another.

"We have just been on a trip to the place where all magicians send the people they cause to disappear, and we brought back these gremlins to prove what has been concealed from the deluded public so long: That magic is caused by gremlins alone. Here they are, and here are the gifts they gave us on our visit. If any of you gentlemen would like to visit the world of the gremlins, just step right up. . . ."

The audience began to clap, to them it was a superb act, something so far above what they expected that they could not express their admiration. But there were no takers on the offer to go through the fountain—and I could understand why. Some of those people must have realized they had witnessed something so out of the ordinary as to be utterly unbelievable to ordinary

man.

I shook hands with each of the gremlins who had carried our gifts, and Lola placed her hand on each bony ugly shoulder in turn and smiled her good-by. They stepped back through the fountain, all but one small shy brown maid, and she had ran off the stage after Mary and Trixie, unable to bear the scrutiny of the battery of strange eyes.

As quickly as the last little man had disappeared, I stepped behind the fountain and gave a mirror a nudge with my shoulder. I broke out in a cold sweat with realization that we would have been forever cut off if just one blundering foot had stumbled against just one of those mystically aligned mirrors.

The big black star of distorted space disappeared with a faint audible plop. I gave a vast sigh of relief and disregarding any further attempt at a show, turned back to the heap of jewelry. Someone dropped the curtain in front of us, dragged off the still unconscious comedian. Lola turned to me, suggesting:

"You know, Frank, we promised to send them back gifts to show our gratitude. . . ."

"They're probably all dead of old age by now, we've been here all of five minutes."

"It doesn't seem right, Frank!"

"Look, Lola, you can open that trap-door into infinity again if you want to, but as for me, I'm leaving it strictly alone. Would you like to marry me, now that we're both rich, or would you rather go into society?"

"What would I do in society, Frank?"

For a minute it didn't register, then I got it. She meant yes! Impossible but true!

* * *

The only thing that ever bothers

Lola and I here in our ranch outside Hollywood, is explaining where "Did you get such an odd looking servant? She's positively hideous, and her eyes! Distinctly malevolent! I wouldn't trust

her for a minute!"

There's one thing about our ranch-house. There isn't a mirror in it! Odd, isn't it?

THE END



POWER THROUGH THE AIR

★ By CARTER T. WAINWRIGHT ★

IN THIS age of atomic power, radar, and rocket ships we have seen the most fantastic dreams of the science-fictionists come true. Nothing, any longer, seems to be impossible. There are two gadgets, however, that the world is waiting for—and undoubtedly they will appear eventually. But right now there seems to have been little progress except in one of them.

The first device that needs consideration is some sort of mechanism for the storage of electrical energy. Electrical batteries do not store electricity—they store chemical energy which is changed to electrical energy. There are two simple things which actually store electrical energy—the condenser and the coil. The first stores power in the form of an electric field and the latter stores power in the form of a magnetic field. The trouble is that neither of these devices stores enough energy—mere driplets which have no meaning as far as doing real work is concerned. A fortune awaits the person who can invent some practical way of storing huge quantities of electrical energy that may be released under complete control.

The next problem is the transmission of power without wires. This has been a dream of many men—Nicola Tesla among the more notable, as well as some of the best known scientists and inventors of all time. The funny thing is this: the wireless transmission of power actually exists today!—it is radio. But everyone knows the drawback there. Not enough power is transmitted and what is sent spreads over such a huge area that it arrives at any one receiver in minute, infinitesimal amounts. An ordinary radio receiver picks up not more than a few millionths of a watt of electrical power. This applies to radar transmission as well. But the latter—radar transmission—supplies us with a clue of sorts to the practical transmission of energy. In radar we are

dealing with beams of radio waves, closely focused so as to concentrate the maximum amount of energy on the receiving machine. By continually narrowing the beam, by using every variety of parabolic reflector or similar focusing aid, it is possible to get a great deal more energy on the receiving end.

Unfortunately even this isn't the answer. Radio and radar beams near the surface of the earth fall off in intensity inversely as the first power of the distance. So as long as the receiver is very near the transmitter, a fair amount of power can be received; but the minute the transmitter is moved more than a few yards away from the receiver there is little energy to be caught.

Probably the answer is that some entirely new approach must be devised. A method must differ radically from the conventional techniques now employed. In an issue of *Amazing Stories* of not long ago, a solution was suggested in which the ground formed one part for a conductor and radiation was the other. It is not likely that this would prove feasible, because it is already being done. That is just about how an ordinary radio transmitter and receiver work. No, the answer lies along entirely different lines.

That the answer will be found of course is without question. It is just a matter of time. What is so disheartening is that no new avenues of approach have even suggested themselves. At present we know as little as we did ten years ago. Some way must be found to concentrate radiation into a tight, narrow beam, almost like a stiletto, and to hurl this beam at an appropriate receiver. Even parabolic reflectors cannot yet do that with ordinary or high frequency radiation. Perhaps the solution lies in some radically new type of transmitter employing some other apparatus besides an antenna to send forth its power.

* * *



Contract for a Body

by Webb
Marlowe

EVERYONE at the bar looked at his drink as Montrose passed by.

He peered eagerly for a receptive face. When he reached the end of the bar, Montrose knew it was the brush-off. He stopped then, uncertain, wondering whether to go back to the street or try among the tables in the rear.

Callaghan, the bartender, saw him standing there. Cal's broad, Irish face softened a little. He put his hands flat on the bar and leaned over it.

"If it's a drink ye're wantin', Monty," he croaked, "I'll give ye wan—and no more."

Montrose managed a wry grin.

"I need more than a drink, Cal. But thanks, anyway." He caught sight of Jack Rahn, sitting alone at a table in the corner. "I—I have to see Rahn."

"Whatever ye need, *he* won't give it to ye." Callaghan's voice was bitter, but low.

Montrose squared his broad shoulders and strode to the table in the corner. Behind him, a juke box blared above a rumble of conversation, but he didn't hear it.

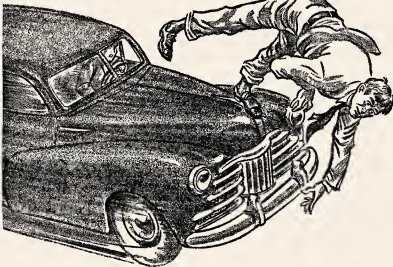
Jack Rahn looked up as Montrose stood over him.

"Lo, chum." The little man's voice

**Frank Montrose needed money
badly so he sold his body, to be
delivered after his death—or so he
thought . . .**



There was a harsh screech of brakes as the laundry truck tried to stop, but it was



too late. Frank Montrose screamed hoarsely as the fender of the truck struck him . . .

was flat. He did not ask Montrose to sit down.

"Hello, Jack. Look, I want to talk to you."

"I'm expecting company, chum."

"It'll only take a minute, Jack. Listen."

Montrose paused. When Rann made no move, Montrose pulled out a chair and sat down. He stared across the scarred table-top at the thin face, trying not to hate the evil little man.

Jack Rann gave him a slow stare that took in the frayed collar, the wrinkled tie, unpressed suit.

"Yeah, I know." Montrose's mouth twisted. "I look like a tramp."

"Chum, you *are* a tramp."

"Maybe. Everybody isn't as lucky as you, Jack. Most people have their ups *and* downs. Right now, I'm down."

Rann shrugged. He sipped slowly at his drink.

"This is what I wanted to see you about. I've got a terrific tip on a hundred-to-one shot."

Rann's laugh grated through the smoky air. Two men at the bar turned their heads sharply toward the noise, then looked quickly back at their drinks. Rann's laugh was a rare—and unpleasant, thing.

"Save your breath, Monty," Rann said. "This hot tip—you want to borrow the dough from me for a bet."

"Yes. But this is *my* chance! It may sound screwy—but I've got a real hunch! I know that horse is going to win!" He gripped the table's edge with both hands as he leaned forward. "Lend me a hundred bucks, Jack and I'll give you half the take. Five grand!"

"Scram, chum."

Montrose leaned forward still. Inwardly, he writhed at the sight of the gloating face before him. He hated himself for asking Rann for the money.

But he had to. He *knew* the horse would win and he had to bet on it.

"It's a cinch, Jack!"

Rann shook his head slowly, tantalizingly. His slate eyes showed a brief flash of mirth, were cold again.

"I've done you favors, Jack. A hundred bucks isn't much."

"It is to me. That's why I've got a hundred."

MONTROSE leaned back in his chair, expelling his pent-up breath in a deep sigh. He stared down at his hands, disgusted at the grime beneath his nails. Five thousand dollars would paw for a lot of manicures.

He peered up at Rann.

"You don't know where I could get it?"

The little gambler started to shake his head, then stopped. He laughed, showing all his teeth.

"Why Monty, I think I do. That is, if you really want the dough."

He laughed again, enjoying the mad hope in Montrose's face.

"Of course I want it."

"Well, then, sell your body. It's not worth much, but you'll get a hundred for it."

"What!"

"Sell your body, I said. To a hospital."

"You little—!" Montrose pulled himself out of his chair. "Sell my body! What kind of malarkey is that!"

Montrose knew then he had had enough. He was still man enough to step on a rat. He drew back his fist.

"All right, dope," Rann snapped. "I'm trying to give you a tip." Ignoring the threatening fist, he took out a cigarette case, selected one and lit it. "Any big hospital will buy your body. You just sign a paper, so your body's theirs when you die, and they give you a hundred bucks."

He grinned maliciously.

"They cut it up, of course, but what do you care?"

"You're not fooling me?"

"Seems to me there's a hospital over on Maple Street. It won't cost you anything to find out."

THERE was a dim light over the entrance. Montrose opened a gate that clanked a little and walked softly toward the door. It didn't look like a very big hospital and a heavy silence seemed to brood over it. Above him, on the fourth floor, a single window showed light.

Why the light, Montrose wondered. Was some poor devil dying? Or was it the surgery? Montrose had a momentary vision of men around a table, cutting, cutting.... He shuddered. He could see his own body, stiff in death, but robbed of death's dignity.

"Damn it!" he muttered. "I can't do this!"

Montrose stopped.

But within him a voice snickered, what's the difference between *that* and the potter's field?

There wasn't any, of course. And Rann was probably lying. Probably...

Montrose ran up the steps and pushed through the doors.

The hall was dim to the point of blackness. Behind the receptionist's curved counter was a switchboard. Above this, a single lamp was the hall's sole light. A man in a white coat sat at the board, dozing over a magazine.

Montrose edged up to him. The orderly looked up sleepily.

"Yes."

"I—I..."

Montrose's throat went suddenly dry. He was overcome with an acute embarrassment.

"Yes? Are you ill?"

"Ob, no! Not at all! Not at all!"

It occurred to him that his value might be lessened if they didn't think him perfectly sound.

"No," he said again, "I'm okay. Never been sick a day in my life!"

The orderly frowned.

"Well, then . . . ?"

"I—well, I want to sell my body."

The orderly was wide awake now. He blinked at Montrose, then sniffed loudly.

"I'm not drunk!" Montrose exclaimed. "I just want to sell the hospital my body to use after I'm dead. To experiment on."

He sighed. It was over. Now, in a few minutes, he'd have the money. But the orderly was grinning.

"Gosh, I suppose they still do that, once in a while," he chuckled. "There's no law against it. And I suppose a big, public hospital can always use a cadaver. But not us."

"Not you!"

"Nope. Didn't you read the sign? We just handle mental cases. We're a private outfit."

"I see."

The inescapable odor of hospital hung on the air; the pungent blend of drugs, medicines and sickness. It fogged Montrose's mind. There was a bazy, inner vision, of a horse galloping across the finish line—without even a dime of Montrose money on it. And there was Rann's face, leering his secret smile. Montrose hated Rann, then. And, no matter what later happened, the hatred never completely left him.

Still in the fog, he didn't hear a door open down the hall, or the sound of quiet, but assured footsteps approaching.

"Oh, good evening, Dr. Aloysio," the orderly's voice was respectful. "I didn't know you were still here, sir."

"Yes. A knotty problem of research."

"Research!"

The word snapped Montrose's consciousness into the clear. He turned toward the doctor.

"Ah, yes."

MONTROSE saw a long, dark face, smooth shaven; deep-set eyes behind black-rimmed glasses. A forehead that swooped in a pale, high dome before it met black hair.

"Well, look...."

The eyes behind the glasses confused him. His voice faltered to a stop.

"I told you!" cried the orderly. "Don't bother the doctor!"

Dr. Aloysio's smile was benign.

"Is there something I can do?" he murmured.

"Oh, no, sir!" exclaimed the orderly. "This man had the idea that we'd buy his body. I told him we wouldn't and referred him to General!"

The doctor chuckled deep in his throat. He beamed at Montrose.

"But the body seems saleable enough," he smiled. "Sturdy and sound."

"Don't kid with me," choked Montrose. "I'm serious!"

"My dear sir," the doctor raised a pale hand. "I, too am serious. If you will just step into my office, I will show you just how serious I am!"

"What!" gaped the orderly.

Dr. Aloysio's eyes blazed behind his glasses. The orderly gulped, then sat down hastily. He tried to pick up his magazine and it fell to the floor.

Dr. Aloysio smiled at Montrose.

"We experiment from time to time," he murmured. "You offer your body for experiment, of course?"

"Sure. Do what you damn please with it. After I'm dead!"

"By all means, after you're dead!"

The doctor chuckled again. The orderly gave him a sidelong look. The

man seemed afraid—and amazed at his fear. He stared furtively after them as the two entered Dr. Aloysio's office.

Montrose stood in the center of the room, trying to focus on what he saw. More dimness. A stand-lamp outlined easy chairs, a wall of books. A deep, rich carpet was beneath his feet. Then, out of the darkest corner, a rotund shape waddled toward him.

"My associate," murmured Dr. Aloysio. "Dr. Fesler, Mr.—?"

"Montrose. Frank Montrose."

"How do you do, sir?" Dr. Fesler's hand was soft and moist. "You will pardon the darkness. I cannot stand light."

"His eyes," said Aloysio. He moved behind Montrose, over to the vague bulk of a desk. "I'm afraid, Fesler, we'll have to have the desk-lamp, at least."

Fesler put a hand in front of his eyes as the light came on. Montrose saw that he was wearing dark glasses. Both men stared calmly at him; Aloysio, erect by the desk, Fesler, directly in front of him. After a long pause, Fesler turned and rolled back to his dark corner. Still, they said nothing.

Montrose tried to laugh. His throat was very dry.

"I suppose you think I'm crazy," his voice was so high it almost broke. "But I need money badly. I'll sell you my body for—whatever the usual fee is."

"And we'll buy it, won't we, Fesler?"

"We surely will," Fesler's voice was barely audible.

"It is a not unusual request," said Aloysio. "I remember when I interned at General—but that's neither here nor there."

He bent down, opened a drawer and took out a pad.

"Please feel no embarrassment, Mr. Montrose. This is a definite contribu-

tion to science. You are really to be congratulated, sir."

"Oh, indeed," Fesler laughed.

HIS soft laugh annoyed Montrose. And the other one, Aloysio, talked much. Oh God, if that horse came in, he'd never, never have to ask anyone for money again!

Dr. Aloysio wrote on the pad, tore off a sheet and wrote again on another sheet. Finally, he looked up.

"If you will just step this way, Mr. Montrose." Montrose reached the desk in two strides. "You see, I've just written a simple agreement, in duplicate. You sign them and keep one for yourself. Use my pen, sir."

Montrose bent over the desk. He heard no movement, but as he reached for the pen, he could hear Fesler breathing beside him.

It seemed simple enough.

"I, Frank Montrose, of my own free will, do hereby assign to the full possession of Dr. Izak Aloysio, my physical body, same to be delivered to him upon my death. In consideration thereof, I have received one hundred dollars."

Montrose straightened.

"Sounds like I'm selling you my body now," he muttered.

Fesler started to speak, but Aloysio's laugh cut him off.

"Indeed you are, sir," Aloysio nodded. "As soon as you sign and I pay you, the body's *mine*. But I don't think the law would allow *me* to tamper with it until *you* are completely through with it."

"I guess that's right."

Montrose began to write. His hand trembled. He could see that horse again, ten lengths in the lead and Frank Montrose had a hundred dollars riding the nag at one hundred-to-one!

He straightened. Both men sighed deeply. Dr. Fesler turned away and

lumbered back to his chair in the corner. Dr. Aloysio's eyes followed him and then Montrose was amazed to hear him snicker. Aloysio grinned widely for a moment, then his face smoothed and he turned to Montrose.

"Now, sir," he said, "for the money."

He took out a wallet and extracted ten new ten-dollar bills. He presented them to Montrose with a flourish.

"A moderate price, Mr. Montrose. I fear I am the gainer by it."

Montrose stared at the money in his hand. Feverish anticipation had dulled his capacity for realising. Now, the money was his, but he scarcely felt it. He lifted his head.

"I—I—thanks. I guess I'll be going . . . if there's nothing else?"

"No sir. Not a thing."

Much later, as Montrose made his night long hike to the track, he wondered vaguely why they hadn't attempted to get more information. They didn't know who he was, where he lived, nothing. What guarantee had they that they could collect when—when the time came?

"TURN off that light!" growled Dr. Fesler.

Dr. Aloysio grinned.

"You were always a fool, brother! Not the least bit of imagination! Why pick a body—when bodies must have darkness—"

"Turn off that light!" bellowed Fesler.

"All right, all right!" The study was in darkness. "As I was saying," continued Aloysio's smooth voice, "I am an artist. I was Dr. Aloysio, perfect and complete. Not something that couldn't stand light!"

He stared at Dr. Fesler.

"Even now," he said, "there is still something shapeless about you."

"That's because I'm leaving. I'm

sick of your babble!"

Aloysio's laugh was not pleasant to hear.

"You're angry. You're beginning to see the possibilities of our wager and you know that I'm going to win. Yes, I'm going to win."

He sat quiet in the dark.

FRANK Montrose turned from the rail by the finish line and started toward the tunnel that led to the mutuel windows. This time, there was no thronging crowd of winners surging down the tunnel. Very few people pick a hundred-to-one shot. As he walked along, he realized he had *known* all along that the horse would win.

Why?

He'd made so many wrong guesses the past year. But this had been no guess! This time he had been *certain*.

The mutuel clerk relaxed his habitual impassivity as he counted out ten thousand dollars.

"You're the top winner today, pal," he said.

"Did I have the only ticket on the nag?" asked Montrose.

"Well, I had one!" laughed a voice behind him.

Montrose took the money from the clerk and turned around. He hadn't seen much of her type lately. Tall—healthy—beautiful in a sharp, clean way. Grey eyes met his in a level, direct stare. He found himself meeting her smile.

"We're smart," he chuckled.

"Weren't we!"

The clerk gave her two hundred dollars. Montrose stood, watching her frank delight as she scooped the money into her purse.

He laughed aloud.

The girl gave him a questioning glance.

"I'm standing here with ten thousand

dollars," he explained, "and I haven't a cigarette to my name!"

"Here, have one of mine! I'm not as rich as you, but I do have cigarettes!"

They moved aside to make room for the bettors on the last race. Montrose felt through his pockets. He didn't even have a match!

"That was my last hundred," he confessed. "I didn't have cigarette money. A gateman pal of mine let me in the track."

There was nothing rude in the way she looked at him. His grey eyes looked briefly at his clothes, then long and searchingly at his face.

"You were very brave—or very desperate." Her voice was puzzled.

"Just desperate," he grinned.

She was nice to look at. The powder blue suit fitted her trim figure perfectly. Her brown hair, with a natural wave, curved softly about her face. Montrose smiled to himself. Why not push his luck a little farther?

"Look," he said, "why don't you help me celebrate? Have dinner with me."

She frowned a little.

"It's unconventional, I know." He was very suave. "But I'm playing a hunch again. We'll have a good time. I feel it!"

"We—ell— your hunches seem good ones, Mr. . . . ?"

"Montrose. Frank Montrose."

"I'm Marcia Powers."

Marcia Powers held out her hand. Her clasp was firm and warm.

Much later, they sat in a quiet little place that Montrose had known long before. So long, that the headwaiter had forgotten him, but, on the strength of Marcia's looks and Montrose's new suit he remembered. They drank a long drink and talked quietly.

AFTER a while, Marcia sat silent, staring at the table-cloth.

"I'm rich," smiled Montrose. "I'll offer *two* pennies for your thoughts."

She raised her head slowly.

"This has been a curious day. The first time I ever went to a horse race and—the first time I ever went out with a stranger. . . ."

"If I'm still a stranger, then it isn't my lucky day after all!"

"Frank," Marcia's voice was serious.

"May I ask you a question?"

"Go ahead."

"What have you done with that ten thousand dollars?"

Montrose was amazed to find that he didn't consider the question impertinent.

"I left about eight thousand in the safe at my hotel. I bought some clothes, spent a little tonight. I've got about fifteen hundred on me."

Her eyes widened.

"Do you honestly expect to spend fifteen hundred dollars tonight?"

Montrose looked off toward the orchestra. He had forgotten his plans for this evening. Certainly he had planned to get this girl home early. Then over to Callahan's and get that bastard Rann in a crap game. Yes, he'd promised himself a lot of things for that night—and he'd done just a few of them.

"I don't know," he said at last. "I always carried—carry, a lot of money on me."

Marcia reached across the table and covered his hand with hers. Surprised, he turned to face her.

"You've been awfully broke, haven't you?" As he started to protest, she shook her head. "No, Frank. You looked awfully seedy at the track. I don't know, really, why I went out with you. Somehow, I liked you. I still do. Very much."

He could not cope with her honesty. He couldn't tell *this* girl what he

wanted to do. Or did he still want to do those things? Looking down at her hand, feeling her fingers over his, Montrose decided that he did not.

"Frank," Marcia went on, "I don't live in this city. I'm a small-town girl from upstate. I'm such a hick, I've never seen a horse-race before today. I made that bet by sticking a hairpin through the program."

"That's the best system," he murmured.

She smiled briefly, then her face was serious again.

"But I'm very happy where I live, Frank. Why don't you take your money and come up there? You would be happy, I think. You could do things."

And why not? Who was Jack Rann—the guy who'd stack a deck against his own brother? Who was Callahan—whose charity was a single drink of rotgut? Last night, Montrose had walked along the bar, knowing the final humiliation of being snubbed by pals fearing a touch. Who, indeed, was Frank Montrose—who had to sell his body for a hundred dollars!

Montrose took Marcia's hand in both of his.

"Lead the way, my dear," he said.

DR. ALOYSIO and Dr. Fessler were *not* sitting in the office this time. In fact, they were not sitting at all. And Dr. Fessler had a smirk on his round face.

"If we had done it my way," he chuckled, "he would never have met the girl. It's not working out according to plan, is it?"

Dr. Aloysio laughed aloud.

"My pretty brother," he sneered. "My pretty, foolish brother! I told you that you were no artist—that you lacked imagination!" He rubbed his hands together. "Can't you see it will

be better this way? Can't you imagine that we will have more sport this way?"

Dr. Fesler scowled.

"All right, all right. But I still think the old ways are best."

Dr. Aloysio shook his head pityingly.

"No imagination. No imagination."

MONTROSE parked his coupe at the curb in front of the church. The car was like Montrose himself, neat, trim, conservative. He switched off the motor and looked at Marcia, sitting beside him.

Montrose laughed softly.

"You don't seem nervous," Marcia smiled.

"Too much has happened," he replied. "The year has gone by too darned fast."

"It has been a good year, hasn't it, darling!"

"A good year? Hmmn. Sole owner of a nice little construction outfit. Frank Montrose, Builder! Twenty thousand in the bank! And..."

"And?"

"It looks very much as though I'm being dragged to the preacher to see about getting married!"

"Do you like the idea very much?"

"When it's the loveliest girl this side of Paradise! This side? Say, I'll include Paradise!"

"Frank! That's sacrilege. And in front of a church too!"

"In three weeks I'll say it inside of a church!"

He lifted her chin and looked at her. God, Montrose thought, I'm lucky! This girl—this wonderful girl—what hasn't she done for me!

"I think we'd better go in," Marcia said at last. "Our appointment's for ten."

He nodded and let go her chin. Montrose reached for the door handle, "Frank!"

then—his hand dropped back.

He turned toward Marcia.

"What—what is it?" he stammered.

"You had the queerest look... of strain... as though you were lifting something!"

Montrose forced a grin.

"I suppose I'm a little embarrassed, darling. I haven't been inside a church for years."

"Is that it! Why, you'll love Dr. Eddison. He's a real person—there's nothing stuffy about him at all!"

Marcia opened her door. This time, Montrose forced himself to get out and started around to her side of the car. What the devil was wrong with him? His feet dragged, his whole body seemed not to co-ordinate.

Montrose lifted a hand to help Marcia from the car, missed her elbow and almost fell.

"Frank!"

He frowned.

Marcia made a joke of it.

"You're not supposed to lose your gallantry until *after* we're married," she chided.

Montrose tried to grin.

"I—I tried to help you," he defended himself. "I think I slipped. Or you were too fast for me."

Marcia was too fast for him going across the sidewalk. He could barely force one foot in front of the other. Suddenly, Frank Montrose was scared. At the edge of the church's lawn he could move no further.

He was paralyzed!

MARCIA looked back over her shoulder. At sight of his straining, sweating face, she rushed back to him.

"Darling! Are you ill?"

What could he say to her? He tried to turn away from her, back out of her reach.

He could turn!

As soon as Montrose tried to move away from the church his feet moved. He took another step. Toward the car. The paralysis left him.

Marcia hurried after him, grabbed his arm.

"Frank, darling! Say something!"

What could he say? What kind of paralysis was this? Why could he move in one direction only? Montrose tried to think very fast.

"I—I don't feel so hot, honey." Sweat poured down his face. "Suppose it's nervous indigestion—probably been working too hard."

"You *do* look ill, Frank. I'm frightened! I'm taking you to a doctor, right now!"

Oh, no! No doctors! Something was stirring, far back of Montrose's consciousness. He could not define it—he didn't full realize it—but it made him feel strangely...*unclean*. He had to be alone. Alone.

"Look," he croaked. "Just take me home. A couple of hours rest and I'll be okay. I've had this before and I know just what to do."

"Well, all right." But Marcia still looked uncertain. "You are looking a little better, thank goodness. I never saw anyone look lie—".

"Never mind," Montrose said hastily. "Just take me home and let me sleep. We can visit Dr. Eddison tomorrow."

As they drove away, Montrose lay back in the seat and closed his eyes. His body felt completely relaxed. He wriggled his toes, surreptitiously flexed his arms. Movement was free and unrestrained!

But crawling along the back of his mind, there was something...Some thought that would explain all this. And the explanation would not be pleasant.

Marcia took him to his apartment,

made him lie down on the couch and covered him with a blanket.

"When you wake up, call me," she ordered, "I'll fix your lunch. And your dinner, too."

She smoothed back his hair and smiled down at him.

"You'll make a wonderful wife," he grinned.

"You go to sleep—or you won't make such a much of a husband! Fainting on the public streets!"

"Did not faint!"

He grinned and closed his eyes. Her lips brushed his and she was gone. Montrose did not see the worried look she gave him just before closing the door.

Montrose waited for a while. Then he arose, went to the kitchen for a bottle and glass and came back to the couch. Carefully, methodically, he poured and drank three drinks.

The rye failed to warm him. It did not relax his mind, allowing all his thoughts to form. Montrose poured a fifth drink. He raised it to his lips, then stopped. It came to him, then, that this was the way he used to meet problems. Drink them out of existence. That had stopped with the coming of Marcia.

But you couldn't tell Marcia that you had a one-way paralysis. Why not? Well, you just couldn't!

MONTROSE stood up. He stretched slowly, raising himself on tip-toe. His body felt fine. Clenching his fists at his sides, he jogged in place for several minutes. Swinging his arms violently, he performed several spectacular bending exercises.

"I'm all right," Montrose gloated. "I'm thirty-four and I'll bet I could run a hundred in ten flat. In fact, I'll go over to the gym and prove it!"

He was a little tight, of course. But

as he walked over to the gym, his stride was long and even and his body was erect.

Montrose looked at his nude body before putting on a gym suit. Not a blemish. Stomach flat, shoulders broad. A damn' good body!

"Hi, Frank! What is this, an Adonis act?"

Dr. Sam Halsey, his chunky body in gym trunks, stood at the end of the row of lockers, grinning widely at him. Montrose blushed, then laughed.

"Hello, Sam! I'm developing a new fixation for you to play around with. I've fallen in love with my big toe!"

"Listen, bud," grinned Halsey, "you wouldn't expect a big-shot alienist like me to fool with that, would you?"

"All right, big shot, just how would you cure it?"

"Simple," Halsey said with mock gravity. "Just amputate the toe!"

The both laughed heartily.

"Say, Frank, how about a few fast rounds? I haven't had the gloves on for a month."

"Swell," nodded Montrose. "Check 'em out, will you, while I get a suit on?"

Montrose slid easily between the ropes and went to one corner of the ring. The padded canvas felt light and springy beneath his feet. He looked warily over at Halsey, now going into his customary crouch. As Montrose edged out into the ring, he remembered the drinks. Have to keep Halsey away from the body, today.

"Okay?" called Halsey.

"You may fire when ready, Gridley."

Halsey hunched his shoulders and charged. It was his usual attack. Montrose, taller and with a decided edge in reach, usually side-stepped that first rush and did some deadly work with a left jab.

Not today, however.

Montrose extended his hand for the jab. That is, he *tried* to extend it. His left, and then his right, came up and covered his face—like a child shutting his gaze off from some feared thing. Nor did Montrose side-step. Instead, he jumped wildly backward, bounced against the ropes, then turned his back to Halsey and ran away from him.

Halsey stopped.

"Hey!" he grunted. "What goes?"

Montrose crashed into the ropes at the opposite side of the ring.

"Don't hit me!" he yelled. "You mustn't hurt me!"

Halsey dropped his hands.

"Huh! What did you say?"

Montrose dropped his hands. He stared at Halsey, eyes glassy with fear. Halsey frowned at that fixed stare. Then, Montrose shook his head. *Intel**ligent* fear replaced the hysteria in his eyes.

"Wha—what did I say?" he stammered.

Halsey told him.

Montrose looked down at his gloved hands.

HALSEY went over to him. He laid a glove on Montrose's shoulder, noticing the involuntary wince as he raised the glove.

"Tell me, Frank." It was the psychiatrist speaking now. "What's wrong?"

Montrose did not lift his head.

"I—oh hell, Sam! I might as well tell the truth! I was scared! I *had* to cover up—run away, so you couldn't hit me!"

"You were afraid of getting hurt?"

"That's it!" Montrose raised his head and looked beseechingly at the other. "You know I'm not a coward, Sam!"

"Sure I do," soothed Halsey. "Now, you and I are getting dressed and then

we'll go over to my office. Something's bothering you, fellow, and I'll find out what it is!"

They had quite a talk. Halsey opened a bottle of very good Scotch, let Montrose have all he wanted. In half an hour, Montrose was telling the story of his life. When he had finished, Halsey fiddled with his key chain for a while, then grinned at Montrose.

"I envy you," he said. "You've been places and done things."

"I'm a lot happier right here in Pleasanton!"

"With a girl like Marcia! You should be, Frank!"

Halsey cleared his throat.

"You see, Frank, Marcia's really the crux of the matter. Tell me, does she know about this deal you made with the hospital?"

"God, no! As a matter of fact, I'd forgotten it myself—until today...."

Halsey nodded.

"I see. Well, fellow, you *haven't* forgotten about it! At least, your subconscious has made quite a play with that fact."

"What's that got to do with Marcia?" frowned Montrose.

"A guilt sense. Subconsciously, you believe that your body doesn't belong to you any more. You can't marry Marcia with a body that doesn't belong to you. It's cheating yourself and her!"

Montrose fiddled with his empty glass.

"That sounds pretty far-fetched to me, Sam," he muttered. "I don't quite get it."

"Look." Halsey's voice was patient. "You're a high strung, imaginative fellow. You're deeply in love with Marcia. You feel that she has re-made your life—which she has. And because of this—this sale of your body—you don't feel worthy of her. That

rankles!"

"And that's why I—I couldn't go in the church?"

"Sure."

"Then what do I do?"

Halsey leaned back in his chair, grinning widely.

"I wish I could cure all my patients as easily." He looked at his watch. "Let's see, it's noon. You get the one o'clock plane to the city. Go over to the hospital and buy back that damn' bill of sale. Tear it up—come back here—and I'll get tight at your wedding!"

Montrose hesitated, then rose slowly from his chair.

"Are you sure, Sam?"

"Of course I am!"

"We—ell...it sounds good. But I've had the feeling as though this was something I didn't know about—something I, personally, couldn't control..."

HE PAID the driver and stood for a moment, staring curiously at the small hospital. Actually, he was seeing it for the first time. Montrose walked slowly up the tiled walk. His hand slowed a little as he reached to push open the door. A vague uneasiness crept over him.

A brisk, middle-aged woman in a severe suit looked up from the switchboard as Montrose approached.

"Yes?"

"I'd like to see Dr. Aloysio."

"Dr. Aloysio does not see anyone without an appointment."

"I think he will know me. Mr. Frank Montrose. I'm in the city for just an hour or two and it's very urgent."

"All right," the woman said doubtfully. "I'll call him."

Montrose turned away as she plugged in the call. The air was still heavy with the hospital smell. But, in the

afternoon light, the place was certainly different. More cheerful. He tried to picture the haunting gloom of his previous visit.

"Dr. Aloysio does not know you, sir." Montrose swung back to face her. "If you will state your business, he will give you an appointment."

Montrose frowned. Had the doctor forgotten? Of course not! No one, even J. P. Morgan, forgets giving out a hundred dollars. Then what went on here?

"Ask Dr. Aloysio to think again," Montrose snapped. "Just mention one hundred dollars to him!"

The woman's mouth tightened.

"Dr. Aloysio has an excellent memory," she grated. "He said that he had never heard of you!"

Montrose paled. The woman flinched a little before the blazing fire in his eyes. Blind, hot anger surged over him. The day had been terrible enough without this last, unreasonable complication.

"I think," he grated, "that I can soon convince Dr. Aloysio that he does remember me!"

He strode down the corridor to the office door. The woman started to rise, then hastily plugged in a line.

Montrose jerked open the door and stalked into the office of Dr. Aloysio.

Dr. Aloysio was seated at the big desk.

"Who are you, sir." There was restrained anger in the clipped tones. "What do you want?"

Montrose stood in front of the desk. He leaned forward, palms of both hands flat on the desk's oaken top.

"Take a good look, Dr. Aloysio," he said as calmly as he could. "Don't you remember me now?"

The cold eyes behind the glasses gave no hint of recognition.

"I do not, sir."

The doctor's phone rang. The doctor ignored Montrose completely as he lifted it from its cradle.

"Yes? Yes, he is here now. If I do not phone you in five minutes, summon two orderlies!"

That was wrong. Even in his anger, Montrose remembered the other voice. The Dr. Aloysio had been pompous, wordy. Now....

The devil with that! A man's voice is different at different times! And he wasn't here to worry about this damned doctor's vocal characteristics. Montrose took out his wallet and took out a hundred dollars.

"Let's cut out the foolery, Dr. Aloysio," he snapped. "There is a hundred dollars. Take it and give me back the agreement!"

Dr. Aloysio stared at the bill.

"My dear sir," he said, "I do not know you at all. Still less do I know what you are talking about!"

He almost convinced Montrose. The hand that held the money wavered, drew back. Dr. Aloysio permitted himself a small nod. That jerked Montrose back to his taut fury.

HOLDING himself in as best he could, Montrose jerked out the story of the episode of a year ago. Dr. Aloysio's eyes widened, then narrowed in a stare of clinical appraisal. When Montrose had finished, he arose, walked around the desk and stood in front of Montrose.

"Mr. Montrose," he said, "you are obviously not drunk. From a cursory examination, I would think you sane—sane but, at present, emotionally unbalanced. You—"

"I did not come here for an examination!" Montrose's voice rose. "Damn it to hell—I've had a bad day—I'm not going to stand here and let you make it worse. I don't know what

your motive is and I don't give a damn! But, damn you—tell me you didn't write this! If you can!"

Montrose tossed the money on the desk. It slipped to the floor, but neither man noticed it. His whole body was trembling as Montrose jerked out his wallet again. His fingers probed awkwardly for the agreement, found it, creased and worn. He smoothed it out, held it in front of the doctor's face.

"Take a look at that! You wrote it and your fat friend, Fesler, watched you write it!"

"Fesler? Dr. Fesler?"

"Oh, God!" cried Montrose. "Won't you stop it! He was here in the office with you."

Dr. Aloysio lost his impersonal calm for the first time. His voice was hesitant as he said,

"My good friend Dr. Fesler died three years ago."

There was a loud knock at the door.

"Go away, boys," called Aloysio, "it's all right."

As retreating footsteps sounded down the hall, Aloysio held out his hand.

"Let me see that agreement, please."

Montrose handed it over. Aloysio looked at it carefully. He sighed. Most of his professional aplomb came back.

"I did not write that, Mr. Montrose. Wait," as Montrose opened his mouth. He opened a drawer in the desk. "Here is one of my notebooks. Compare the handwritings."

Montrose did so. The room teetered crazily. His anger left him, to be replaced with a crawling, snickering fear. The handwriting of the agreement was not that of Dr. Aloysio. From afar off, Montrose seemed to hear a wild, jeering laugh.

"Here, man!" cried Dr. Aloysio. "Sit down."

Montrose felt his arm taken, was steered to a chair. He felt himself fall

into an easy chair, heard the doctor move back to his desk. Then the sharp fumes of smelling salts cleared his fogged brain.

Dr. Aloysio put the glass stopper back on the bottle.

"I'm sorry," his voice was kind. "I didn't understand. You seem to be the victim of some ghastly kind of joke."

But Montrose did not quit just yet. He forced himself to sit erect.

"Dr. Fesler's dead, eh!" he croaked. "How about the fellow at the switchboard?"

Dr. Aloysio shook his head.

"We had to discharge him about ten months ago for drunkenness. He was totally unreliable." He took out cigarettes, gave one to Montrose and lit it. "You see, Mr. Montrose, at the time you mention, I myself was in bed with a severe attack of pleurisy. I can only conclude that someone, with the connivance of the man at the switchboard, played a joke on you."

Montrose stumbled to his feet. He stared at Dr. Aloysio for a long while, then began to laugh crazily.

"Somebody bought my body!" he cried. "Where am I going to buy it back!"

Dr. Aloysio took Montrose's arm. Montrose shook it off and staggered toward the door.

"Going to get drunk," he mumbled. "Drink all this—all of it—right out of existence!"

"You can't do that!" cried the doctor. "Stay here until you calm down—"

But Frank Montrose had gone through the door. As he reeled down the corridor, Montrose saw nothing of his surroundings, but his crazed mind seemed to hear jeering laughter.

"BUDDY," said the cab driver. "This hack aint a botel room!"

The nasal voice penetrated Montrose's consciousness. He opened his eyes. Montrose shook his head, then stopped abruptly. Leaning over the back of the driver's seat, the cabbie grinned without mirth.

"You look like a wreck, buddy," he said.

"I feel it." Montrose's voice was thick. "Where are we?"

"We're at the airport. Remember?"

"Airport! What airport? My God—am I still in the city?"

The driver nodded.

"Yep." He glanced casually over Montrose's wrinkled suit, soiled shirt; his eye paused at the unshaven chin. "I would say, pal, that you've seen a lot of our fair city."

Montrose turned his head. Looking outside, he was surprised to see it was broad daylight.

"It's morning," he muttered.

"Sure. Monday morning—".

"Monday!"

"Sure."

Monday! Montrose had come down on Friday. What had happened—a three day drunk? Why? There was a whole covey of butterflies in his stomach, but he forced himself to think.

And slowly the picture came back. Of the doctor and his terrible proof that he'd never written that purchase agreement. Of Montrose running from the hospital, helpless, alone—making for the nearest bar. Then, lots of bars. Drunk. The old way out, the way he'd always taken when things went wrong.

"Go on to the airport," Montrose cried. "Is there a plane soon?"

"Yeah. You got any dough left, buddy?"

Montrose opened his wallet. A ticket and a single ten were all he had left. The driver nodded at the money and started up his cab. Montrose saw

Marcia's picture in his billfold. Marcia!

A three day drunk—while Marcia had probably gone crazy with worry. No—Frank Montrose was the crazy one. What had been this business of a body? A body sold to a doctor that didn't exist. Montrose laughed. Maybe the body didn't exist, either.

The noise of the plane's motors was definitely not soothing. Montrose clasped his aching head between his hands and tried to think. He couldn't. It might have been the hangover—very likely it was, but he couldn't quite focus his mind on any one matter.

When he arrived in Pleasanton, the problem of Marcia forced everything else from his mind. For a while, horror went away, replaced by a purely normal worry as to how he was going to square things with her.

He had just finished drying himself after an icy shower when his doorbell rang. It was Marcia.

"Frank! Oh, Frank—what happened? Are you all right?"

She held out her hands and for a brief moment he was safe in her embrace, everything else forgotten. Then, she drew back.

"Frank," she said slowly. "I think you owe me an awful lot of explanation."

Marcia looked closely at him. Montrose hadn't shaved yet and it would take several night's sleep to clear up his eyes. Montrose jammed his fists tight into the pockets of his dressing gown. He tensed with the effort of meeting her eyes, but couldn't quite make it.

"I guess I went on a tear, honey," he muttered.

Marcia looked at his clothes, still heaped where he had thrown them. Then she walked slowly over to a window and looked out.

"I guess you did," she said. "Why?"

"I don't know."

Marcia turned and faced him, but she did not move toward him.

"Frank," her voice was low but clear.

"Do you really want to marry me?"

"Good God!" Pain rang in his voice.

"How can you doubt it!"

"Frank," her tone was controlled, "your behavior at the church was very strange. I believed you when you said you were ill, yet—I couldn't help thinking that you looked....frightened."

MONTROSE'S mouth twisted. God forbid she should ever know just how scared he'd been. But not of her....

"Then," Marcia went on, "you called me and said you must fly down to the city. You were to be back for dinner. You were gone three days—without a word to me."

The sunlight streamed through the window, giving her loveliness a golden frame. Her beauty hurt him. What could he say?

The truth?

What was the truth?

Like any man in his position, Montrose tried to postpone the inevitable.

"Look, Marcia," he said. "I honestly don't know when I ate last. Would you wait while I finish dressing, then have some breakfast with me?"

"I've already eaten."

"Well, watch me, then!" he exclaimed. "And then I'll explain everything. Honest."

Montrose stepped toward her, his hands outstretched, pleading. Marcia shrugged.

"All right, Frank," she sighed.

They walked silently along. Marcia stared straight ahead, her silence creating a distance between them. But Montrose didn't mind. He had arrived at a decision. He would tell her every-

thing, making no attempt to explain it, just give her the whole story. Then, it would be up to Marcia. At least, she would give him no balderdash, like Halsey's pat theories. Yes, or no—and he would stand or fall at her word.

At the next corner, just a few short steps from the restaurant, it happened. A commonplace sort of accident. An old lady, walking blindly against a traffic light, blundered in the path of an oncoming truck.

"Frank!" Marcia screamed.

Montrose tried to move. He could have reached the old woman in time, jerked her back to safety. A policeman blew his whistle, lumbered toward them.

But Montrose could not move. Paralysis flowed over him. He panted with the struggle to move.

The expression on Marcia's face changed. Suddenly and terribly and completely. Then she started for the street. And now, there *wasn't* enough time. The truck would have smashed them both, Marcia and the old woman.

The lumbering policeman threw himself forward, caught Marcia's arm. At the last, incredible moment, the little old lady saw her danger. She dodged back to safety.

The paralysis left Montrose.

"Marcia! Marcia!" he screamed. He ran to her. "Darling, are you all right?"

"Of course she's all right," boomed the cop. "I may have bruised her arm a bit. But she's okay, aren't you, Miss?"

"Yes."

Marcia and the policeman stared at Montrose.

"Thank you, officer," she said at last. "You saved my life, you know."

"Now, now." The big face reddened. He scowled at Montrose. "You'd better

take a little more care of your girl, I'm thinking." He turned away. "Now, where did the old lady go? That one needs a lecture!"

"Marcia," stammered Montrose. "I—I..."

He reached for her hand. Marcia drew back.

"You just stood there," she breathed. "Too frightened to move."

Her lip quivered. Then her head went high.

"You're a coward, Frank. I know it. I'd never forget it."

Her hands clasped together, came apart. Marcia held something out toward him. It was the ring he'd given her.

Someone laughed. Montrose was suddenly conscious that others were watching him. He stared wildly around, caught sight of the cop. There was a look of approval on the officer's face.

"But..."

Montrose lifted his hands. There was a clink as the ring fell at his feet. Montrose let his hands drop to his sides.

As Marcia walked away, her shoulders slumped a little, then began to tremble. But there was nothing, now, that Montrose could do.

"Move on," growled the policeman. "Pick up your ring and beat it!"

DR. FESLER, if he can still be called that, smirked at Dr. Aloysio.

"Well, what's so funny?" snapped the latter.

"You look so ridiculous in that get-up," wheezed Fesler. "As an old lady, brother, you are definitely comic!"

Dr. Aloysio waved a hand and was himself again.

"Damn it!" he growled. "It was such a neat plan. To have him look on, helpless, while his beloved was smashed to bits by a truck!"

"Ah, well," grinned Fesler. "Destiny fights on my side. There are limitations...."

Aloysio laughed suddenly.

"The plan unfolds, now, dear brother! Get ready to pay me!"

SWAYING with the motion of the train, Montrose lurched up to the lounge car's bar.

"A bottle of rye!" he ordered.

The attendant handed over a bottle.

"You gonna drink all that befo' we get to Los Angeles, sah?"

"I'm going to damn well try to," growled Montrose. "Keep the soda and ice coming!"

He sat alone in the far corner of the car. As the hours passed, the car gradually emptied itself of passengers. Montrose drank steadily, oblivious of his surroundings. He stared down at the jolting floor, drinking, smoking... and staring.

"Beg pahdon, sah, but even this train has to close up at two o'clock!"

Montrose looked up at the white-jacketed attendant.

"Is it that late!" he exclaimed.

"Suah is. Don't you think, sah, you ought to go to bed?"

Montrose scowled.

"Think I'm drunk?"

The porter glanced at the nearly empty bottle, then looked long and hard at Montrose. His eyes rolled a little.

"Why—I guess you aint, sah. Though you suah oughta be!"

"Then get the hell out of here and let me alone."

Montrose's mouth twisted in a sneer. No control, he muttered wearily. His body wouldn't even respond to alcohol any more. His memory checked back over the past week. That terrible week of trying to see Marcia; of finally giving her up and then, after the Athletic Club had kicked him out and

he had lost two cinch contracts, selling his business at a loss and leaving town.

During that time he had tried to get tight. But he never had. He couldn't do it now.

Montrose leaned back in his chair. In careful order, he marshaled the main events of his life. An ordinary wastrel, at first, until that night at the hospital. Then, he'd found some very fine things—only to lose them. Events—events he could not control—events had ordered *him* about!

He sat upright. Dazedly, he contemplated that fact. He held out his hands and blinked at them. They weren't really his, for he couldn't always control them. Montrose looked down at his feet—the feet that had refused to enter the church.

Then it was true—he *had* sold his body! But to whom? How could he ever redeem it? Montrose picked up his glass and emptied it. Well, he thought, the old hands will still bring liquor to the old mouth and the old mouth will still swallow. He drank again. Perhaps he did get a little drunk, for he began to think of Marcia—even saw her face, shadowy and vague, float before his own.

And then Montrose became angry. He had been cheated. The sale had been made for delivery after death! And they, whoever they were, had taken possession before—before the lease expired. Montrose laughed at his own thoughts, then grew serious! It was no joke—he had been cheated.

A crafty gleam grew in his eyes. He looked down the car's length to the vestibule door. That would do very nicely. He, Frank Montrose, would do a little cheating on his own account. He got to his feet, picked up the rye and drank from the bottle. Setting the bottle down, he started slowly down the car.

He opened the door of the vestibule and stood on the steps. The wind whipped his face. Montrose stood there for a moment, balanced precariously. His glance dropped to the ground, a grey blur under the train's speed. It seemed to draw him.

Yes, that was it. Nothing mattered now, since he had lost Marcia... and himself. Clinging to the handrail with one hand, he swung himself around between the two cars. This would be ideal. His body would be mangled beyond all recognition—there would be absolutely nothing left to collect.

Laughing aloud, Montrose let go the rail.

A hand caught his. For a moment, Montrose dangled, then the hand that gripped his pulled him back. Montrose banged against the car, his feet scraped over the steps. One more pull and he was crouched on his knees in the vestibule. He heard the outside door close, then a laugh grated against his consciousness.

"Mr. Montrose! That was cheating, sir!"

Montrose looked up. Dr. Aloysie stood before him. Eyes sparkling behind the black-rimmed glasses, high forehead gleaming palely in the darkness.

"You!" Montrose screamed.

He staggered to his feet.

"Of course. I must protect my interests. If you had—ah, succeeded, how could I have obtained my property?"

Montrose staggered forward. The doctor's figure wavered, blurred, then disappeared.

Montrose fainted.

THE PORTER and the conductor accepted his explanation that he had fainted, although it was obvious both thought him lying. As Montrose

lay sleepless in his berth, he heard the porter come and listen several times outside the curtains.

But he did not care. He left the train at Los Angeles, smiling slightly at the porter's sigh of relief at his going. But it was surface amusement only. Frank Montrose considered himself no longer of this world. His mind was fixed on death. For death, the proper kind of death, would break the bargain, make him a winner at last.

He checked his bags at the station and set out on an aimless walk. He was not surprised to discover he had no hangover. As he walked, Montrose passed a small church. His footsteps walked on. Religion had always meant little to him and, since he didn't quite believe in God, he couldn't accept the Devil, either.

Had he been more imaginative, he might have gone insane.

All he did was to stop at an occasional bar and drink a little. Not that he wanted to get drunk...even if he *could* have gotten drunk. Drinking was just something to do.

It was at the third bar that the idea hit him. He grinned slowly as the idea unfolded in his mind. When the plan had perfected itself, he chuckled aloud. He lifted his glass in a silent toast to his success and drank deeply. For the first time in days, the rye tasted good to him.

"Fill her up," he said.

The bartender did so.

"Say," Montrose said genially, "I'd like to ask you a question."

The bartender rubbed the bar with a dirty towel.

"Shoot," his voice was bored.

Montrose leaned over the bar.

"Well, he said, "I was just thinking. Suppose a guy is executed in this state. What happens to his body?"

The bartender stared.

"Jeez!" he exclaimed. "You're morbid, pal!"

Montrose shook his head.

"Not at all," he grinned. "I'm a crime writer. Just blew in here. I'm going to do some free-lance stuff."

"I dunno," he said. "Guess the nearest of kin gets it. If they want it. Otherwise—yeah, I'm sure of it!"

"What's that?" Montrose found the barkeep's mind a little hard to follow.

"There's a cemetery at the prison. I know that, 'cause I was up there once. As a visitor, of course."

"Sure," nodded Montrose.

"Fella I was visitin' pointed it out to me. If you get executed and they aint no relatives, why they bury you right there in the prison grounds."

"Fine. Thanks a lot." Montrose beamed. "Have one on me!"

"Later, maybe." The bartender moved off. "Gotta take care of those loudmouths at the other end, first."

EVEN the clamor of the omnipresent juke-box sounded pleasant to Montrose's ears. He was at peace with the world. Carefully, he went over the plan in his mind. It was foolproof. There would be unpleasant aspects, of course. He could not help shuddering at the final scene. But it was all compensated for. Yes, it made everything even.

"Hi, pal," said a voice at his shoulder.

Montrose turned his head. A thin nondescript sat down beside him.

"What'll yuh have, pal?"

The newcomer was at that stage of drunkenness when all the world was his friend. Montrose started to turn away, then looked back at the lush. It might as well be now, he thought....

"Why," Montrose said, "I'd like another rye."

"Fine. George, two more ryes." He

leaned toward Montrose. "Tha's not his real name. But I always call 'im that."

"Why not? It saves time."

"Zactly wha' I say." He nodded at Montrose. "Mighty happy to have drink with me. Been drinkin' with some of the fines' people'n Lossanglus. M'name's Hayes. Jus' call me Perry. Tha's firs' name."

"Glad to know you. I'm Frank Montrose."

They drank.

"Always say Lassanglus fines' place in world with fines' people," said Mr. Hayes. "Knew moment I saw you, you fines' of 'em all!"

Mr. Hayes nodded his head with great emphasis and almost fell off his stool.

"Oh," said Montrose, "I'm fine enough, I guess. I'm also pretty smart."

"So?" Hayes' eyes grew round with wonder. "Me. I'm dumb."

"You look dam' intelligent to me," said Montrose.

Hayes beamed. They had more rye. The bartender moved back to his "loud-mouths" at the other end. Montrose looked over the bar and saw a short knife, used for cutting lemons. He leaned over the bar, snatched up the knife and stuck it in his coat pocket.

"Whaddye do tha' for?" asked Hayes.

"A bet," grinned Montrose. "Pal of mine bet me ten bucks I couldn't lift it. Say!" He faced the goggling Hayes. "You're just the guy I need! A witness!"

Hayes giggled.

"Look," said Montrose. "You saw me lift the knife. How about coming along and helping me collect the bet. Then you and I will really paint this town! What say?"

"Sure. 'S a goodidea." Hayes fished

for more money.

"Drinks are on me," said Montrose.

"Nossir!" Hayes became stubborn. "You're my gues'. I'mbuyin'."

Montrose shrugged. It was low, somehow, to let Hayes pay, in light of what was going to happen to Hayes. But he didn't dare argue with a drunk. a drunk's reaction's are too unpredictable.

Hayes paid and they left the bar, arm in arm.

Montrose walked slowly, pretending to stagger a little, waiting until they came to an intersection. There was a traffic policeman in the middle of the street. A couple of men were just stepping off the curb on the other side of the street. Plenty of witnesses....

Montrose shrugged off Hayes' arm and pulled the knife.

"All right, sucker," he said loudly. "Hand over that roll you were sporting in the saloon!"

Hayes giggled.

"Come on!" Montrose grabbed his shirt. "Gimme the dough or I'll let you have it!"

"Hey, leggo," mumbled Hayes. "Don' play so rough, pal!"

Montrose shook him and raised the knife.

"Leggo!" cried Hayes. He quailed to sobriety before the awful threat in Montrose's eyes. "Help!" he screamed once.

MONTROSE sunk his knife in the other's chest, turned and ran squarely into the arms of the policeman.

"You're under arrest!" bellowed the cop. "I saw you! Plain as day it was murder!"

"Yeah!" Montrose dropped the knife. "I—I killed him."

He could not look at the small, crumpled body.

"But, officer! You don't understand!"

The two men from across the street stepped briskly up to the policeman. The officer saw two well-dressed men, one tall, the other short and portly. To his practised eye, they meant one thing—importance.

Montrose saw in them the things he still called Dr. Aloysio and Dr. Fesler.

"What do you mean?" rasped the policeman.

"We saw it all," said the tall man. "My friend, here, and I. This man was walking along, pleasantly and amiably, with the—other one. We left the same bar they did, just a minute or so after them."

The street began to rock under Montrose. The policeman scowled.

"Well I—", he grumbled.

The plump man spoke up.

"The dead man tried to quarrel with his friend in the bar. Just as they reached the corner here, he became angry again. He jerked out a knife and assaulted the gentleman you're holding. We saw him pull the knife away, but the other chap seemed to slip and fall right on the knife."

"But I killed him!" screamed Montrose. "It was murder!"

The tall man clucked.

"Poor chap," he murmured. "Shock. You'd be hysterical too, officer, if you'd just killed a friend."

The cop was still unconvinced.

"Who the hell are you, anyway?" he growled. "How do I know this isn't some kind of frame-up?"

The two gentlemen presented cards. As the policeman read the names, his voice lost its growl and he became very deferential.

"Oh!" It seemed he said their names, but oddly enough, Montrose couldn't hear him.

But Montrose didn't care, anyway.

There was one more chance. If he ran, now, the cop would shoot. Even if he weren't killed, flight would be a sure sign of guilt. He stumbled forward.

"Look out!" It was the one Montrose knew as Dr. Aloysio. "The poor chap is fainting!"

And Montrose was fainting. The whole, seething scene spun around into a vast, sneering portrait of Dr. Aloysio. Then, Dr. Aloysio receded into the leering blackness. But not before Dr. Aloysio had leaned forward and whispered in Montrose's ear,

"Please, Mr. Montrose! Don't you realize by now you can't cheat me! Your body is mine, you know. . . ."

HOURS later Montrose stood calmly in the courtroom while the traffic officer mumbled his testimony and the other two gave their version of the tragedy. When it was his turn, Montrose spoke patiently, as though repeating a lesson. Word for word, he gave an account that tallied exactly with that of the two . . . doctors. As he talked, his only sensation was one of vast pity for poor Perry Hayes.

The judge called it justifiable homicide and dismissed the case.

Montrose turned to go. Aloysio and Fesler walked on either side of him. At the sidewalk, Montrose turned.

"Damn you!" he said, slowly, viciously. "Why don't you collect now. I'm tired of it! I don't know who you are—or what happened to me. But take your body. I'm sick of it!"

Dr. Aloysio shook his head sadly.

"Ah, Mr. Montrose," he murmured. "The fault is yours. You don't know how to live—at, a leased body. You don't know how to take *advantage* of it!"

His words pounded against Montrose's mind, even as the two seemed to fade in the bright sunlight. . . .

THE BARTENDER sliced a lemon, slowly and methodically. The joint was as yet but slightly crowded and he wasn't very busy.

"Hi!" sounded a familiar voice. "Let go that lemon and shake hands with me!"

Callahan looked up.

"Monty!" he croaked.

His face creased into a smile.

"Monty!" he repeated. "'Tis good to see ye, lad!"

Callaghan looked Montrose over carefully. Then he reached below the bar and took out a dusty bottle of very old Baltimore rye. It was his seal of approval on what he saw.

"Me boy," he said, as he poured, "ye look very prosperous and I'm glad to see it."

"Prosperous?" Montrose's eyes grew bleak. "Well, I've got lots of money and I can do lots of things, but I wouldn't exactly say I'd prospered."

"Talkin' in riddles, hey? Well, here's to ye!"

They drank. Callaghan cast a look up and down the bar, saw nothing that needed his attention, then leaned forward, elbows on the bar.

"Last time I saw ye was over a year ago. Ye were on yer uppers, then."

Montrose laughed.

"I started my comeback that very night. Got a tip from Jack Rann, which reminds me." His voice was casual. "Is he here?"

Callaghan scowled.

"He is."

"That's fine. I've been looking for him."

"Why?"

Montrose waved his hand airily.

"Well, to be frank with you, Cal, I'm going to kill Jack Rann."

"Somebody should do that." The Irishman did a double take. "What did ye say, Monty?" he whispered.

"I said I was going to kill Rann," Montrose replied.

Callaghan threw up his hands.

"Ye're drunk agin! Monty, why don't you lay off the stuff! And don't you start no ruckus in my place!"

Montrose took out an initialed leather cigarette case. With steady fingers he chose a smoke, lit it and flicked the match away. After a deep drag, he smiled at Callaghan.

"Cal, old boy," he drawled, "I am not drunk and you know it! And I won't start anything. I'll just shoot him, that's all!"

Callaghan's face purpled.

"Did ye ever hear of the electric chair, boy! Didn't ye know they execute people for murder?"

"Not me." Montrose spoke quite seriously. "I've already tried it and I can't be caught. You'll see."

Callaghan found himself believing the other. Unbelief could not stand up before the easy confidence of Montrose. The Irishman was afraid, terribly afraid.

"Ye're not crazy," Callaghan stated.

"No."

"Then what have ye done—sold yer soul to the devil?"

Montrose shook his head.

"No," he said. "Not my soul, Cal."

CALLAGHAN watched him walk to where Jack Rann sat. Unfortunately, a customer summoned him, so Callaghan never did hear what was said.

It wasn't very much.

Montrose stared confidently into Rann's slate eyes, watched them widen with recognition.

"Lo, chum," Rann said. "What are you doing back here?"

"Just a little visit," smiled Montrose. "Came to pay you your commission on a sale."

"Commission?"

"Yes. Remember when you advised me to sell my body to a hospital?"

Rann frowned, then he smiled what was, for him, a wide smile.

"Did that really work?" he chuckled. He hesitated, taking in Montrose's appearance with a quick glance. Then he said, "Sit down and tell me about it. You know, I used to wonder just what put that idea in my mind?"

"Really?" Montrose remained standing.

"Yeah. I didn't know anything about it, chum. I was just tryin' to get rid of you."

"It worked, Rann. I got the hundred. And a lot of other things. Things I didn't bargain for. But you deserve your commission. Even on the *other* things."

Montrose took a gun from his pocket and pointed it at Jack Rann.

"Hey!"

Rann's face turned a dirty gray.

"I never liked you," Montrose said calmly. That night I hated you. I still do. I wouldn't bother with this if I thought I ran any risk."

"Put that gun away, pal. You'll— you'll burn!"

"No. I won't."

Rann began to beg in a high, hysterical voice. He fell to the floor, and writhed like a worm among the litter of cigarette butts. Montrose watched with an almost clinical detachment.

In a fragment of time that seemed endless, Montrose recapitulated the situation. He was going to kill Jack Rann, this groveling creature who had lost all dignity. He felt a sense of pleasure, deep inside himself. This was the way to use a leased body to advantage. He could go about and destroy all worthless men—with impunity. And no man-made punishment would be his. This body was sacred

to some higher power.

From the corner of his eye, he caught movement. Callaghan had thrown a bottle of whiskey at him. Still with an amused detachment, Montrose marked the arc of the bottle. It looked like a true throw, yet it would not hit him, would not destroy his aim. As they had allowed him to kill Perry Hayes, so would they allow him to kill Jack Rann. And no reprisal.

It was really fun. He chuckled a little as he pointed the gun down at Rann. That bottle, flying hard and true, would be swerved aside by . . . something. Or it would disappear in mid-flight. How these barflies would goggle!

HE HELD the gun steady, and began to squeeze the trigger. The bottle reached the top of its flat parabola and began to drop toward his hand. He put a little more pressure on the trigger. The bottle came on. He squeezed hard on the trigger, a fraction of a second behind the impact of the bottle.

It crashed into the gun, knocked his hand to one side. The roar and flash of the gun deafened and blinded him. The bullet buried itself in the floor.

Montrose's jaw went slack. He looked idiotically at the gun.

"What does it mean?" he muttered to himself. "What does it mean?"

Jack Rann leaped up, with desperate despair, and wrenched the gun from Montrose's limp hand. He pointed it at Montrose.

"You saw him;" he babbled. "Tried to kill me! I'm protecting myself. You're witnesses! He flung a wild glance at the bartender. "I'm justified in killing him! You'll testify, Cal!"

"But you can't kill me," Montrose said, as if to a child. "This body can't be hurt. It's being saved for—something. I'm not afraid, you see."

It struck him with a blinding impact. *I'm not afraid!*

What did it mean? He'd always been afraid before. A fear that came from outside himself had sent him fleeing from the gloved fists of Dr. Sam Halsey, had held him paralyzed when death plunged at Marcia. But now that fear was gone.

He thought: Why, I'm about to be killed. I *can* be killed.

He cried aloud, in wild exultation: "I can be killed! Oh, thank God, I can be killed! I'm free, *free!* Kill me, Jack. This is wonderful!"

Jack Rann dropped his arm. He looked at Montrose with a kind of puzzled fear. "You're crazy, Montrose. I can't shoot a crazy man."

"Then I'll kill myself!" Montrose cried. "Oh, God, but I'm happy!"

He turned and ran out the door. Laughing insanely, he plunged into the street.

Brakes screamed. Horns cried in torture. A yellow laundry truck lifted Montrose on a front fender, sent him flying through a short arc.

DEAD men feel no pain. Through a fog of it, Montrose told himself this over and over and over. Dead men feel no pain.

He hadn't died, then. Presently he opened his eyes. He saw brown hair curling gently against a remembered face. Grey eyes anxiously fixed on his. Powder blue sheathed a lovely figure.

"Marcia," he said softly, without wonder, stating a simple but beautiful truth. "Marcia."

"You're going to live, Frank. You're going to live, darling. That's the important thing."

"Is it?" he asked dully. "They cheated me again. They took away the fear, only to fool me. The evil, evil scum!"

"You mustn't talk, dear," she soothed. "You'll be out of your head for a while, but you're going to live."

He looked at her. He thought: Pain. I hurt. I *am* hurt. If this body has been hurt . . .

"What happened to me?" he asked. "My right foot hurts like hell."

A nurse came in. "You mustn't excite yourself," she said pleasantly. "You must gain strength."

"What's the matter with my foot?" he said tensely. "It—feels strange. *What happened to it?*"

"Shh!" the nurse said. "Shhh!"

He tried to sit up, but fell back gasping with pain. "I insist!" he cried. "Tell me!"

"Shh!"

Marcia set her jaw. "I'm going to tell him. I don't care what the doctor said. Your foot was—"

"Miss Powers!" the nurse said sharply.

"Your foot," Marcia said grimly, "had to be amputated, Frank, just above the ankle."

"I must ask you to leave," the nurse began.

"I will not! There's nearly a quart of my blood in that body. I'm going to stay!"

Frank Montrose was suddenly at peace. A beatific smile overspread his face, and the two women looked wonderingly at him.

"I've only got one foot," he said happily. "Nobody—no **THING**—would want me now."

"I would," Marcia said stoutly. "I would, Frank."

She straightened it out for him, later. The news report she had seen. Man rushes to save alley cat in traffic, not expected to live. She had caught a plane, had given two transfusions over a period of six days. He had almost died.

"Alley cat?" he repeated. "I didn't—"

"And it escaped," Marcia burred. "This roving reporter saw it wriggle through the traffic and streak into a barroom."

"I've only got one foot," he murmured. "I have never been so happy."

Marcia said, "And I accused you once of cowardice. You must have been just—sick."

"I can go in that church now," Montrose said. "Marcia will you—?"

"If I have to carry you," she said.

"**T**HEN I pronounce you man and wife," the justice of the peace said. "Two dollars."

Montrose kissed his bride, and she pulled back to look at him with a frown. She said nothing until she had wheeled him out into the lazy afternoon.

"What's come over you, Frank?"

"I was wondering," he said, still abstracted. "If there are—uh, entities waiting outside the realm of ordinary existence, ready to pounce, then . . ."

"What are you talking about?" she demanded. "We're married, darling!"

"They picked me up," he went on. "There was no rhyme or reason, that I can see. Then they flung me aside, without warning. What purpose could they have had? What purpose?"

"Don't talk like that! You're giving me the shivers!"

He grinned up at her. "I'll never mention it again. If you'll wheel me home, my rickshaw coolie, I'll show you what purpose really is. Chop-chop, now!"

"Yes, massa," she said.

They're out there, he thought as she wheeled him home. They're out there, waiting. Who will be next? Who will—?

It seemed to him that an unseen hand had touched the breast pocket of

his coat. He felt. He took out a creased paper. He opened it, remembering.

"I, Frank Montrose, of my own free will, do hereby assign to the full possession—"

It was signed by himself. This was the "doctor's" copy of the agreement. Why had it been returned? He took the other from his wallet, and tore both copies to shreds.

"Is that our marriage license?" Marcia asked, chuckling.

"Just an old memorandum," he said.

And it seemed to him that he heard soft laughter from—somewhere. From—some thing. It wasn't jeering or ominous. It was merely laughter.

A weight seemed lifted from him. "Hurry!" he said to Marcia, and laughed with her.

***T**HE two of them sat in impenetrable darkness. The darkness pulsed with their laughter.*

"I believe I win our wager?" one asked suavely.

"Yes," the other conceded. "I must admit, brother, that bodies, in their limited fashion, are quite amusing. However, I am convinced that the old ways are best. This was a pleasant experiment, but I shouldn't like it as a regular routine."

"I am enamored of it, myself," said the first. "The unsuspected histrionic talents I discovered in myself are fascinating. I am going to indulge in a variation of this experiment."

"On whom, brother?"

"Ah, that is a question. Let me see, shall it be a man or a woman? Which?"

"Why not both?"

"A brilliant thought! Brother, perhaps you have the makings of an imagination, after all. Would you care to join me?"

"To be sure, brother."

THE MAGYAR KILLER

★ By SANDY MILLER ★

W E AMERICANS take an awful ribbing from foreigners about the play that newspapers give to murders and mysteries. Most Europeans have the idea that America is one vast Chicago—a battleground of gangsters and murderers and killers. They have the impression that it is impossible to walk the streets of this country without being armed with a machine-gun. But Europe has had more than its share of the very thing it deplors. Some of the most famous and inexplicable crimes have been committed on the Continent. In particular, Hungary and its capitol city, Budapest, offer some of the most outre events the world has ever seen.

Perhaps this is only proper—Hungary, and the Transylvania mountain district has given us most of our stories and legends about werewolves and vampires. One of the most famous of the mysteries is that of the Cenchas Foundry.

In nineteen twenty-three, there operated in Budapest, a rising young industrial establishment, the Cenchas Foundry. It was a fairly large firm for the city of that time for it had about forty employees, one of whom we are particularly concerned with.

Peter Dushanyi was the foreman in charge of the brand-new gas furnace that the company used for melting copper and brass. He had been working for the firm for a relatively short time but had shown such interest and been so capable that he had been promoted to his job very rapidly. He adored the furnace—was almost in love with it and he tended it with the concern of a man looking after his first-born. Little was known of Dushanyi except that his other mad passion was a love for reading—particularly stories of the outre and weird type. His room was laden with such hooks.

The reason he became known and almost a *cause celebre*, was because of a mysterious murder. One Monday morning, September of that year, the body of Domana Karic, another foundry worker, was found in front of the copper-melting furnace. The man's head had been hashed in with a heavy bar of some kind. Routine police action was immediately taken. Karic had no known enemies, had been a friend of everyone, and his death was completely inexplicable. The police examined everyone in the plant carefully but nothing was found out. Only two peculiarities were noted about the corpse. It was lying on its face in front of the furnace with its hands stretched out as if in worship of a god, and in addition, there was a slight nick or cut in its



throat. To the superstitious Hungarian workmen, that meant vampirism, but of course, the police laughed at the thought. Never-the-less, in spite of all that could be done, his murderer was not located and the case was closed. There the matter rested and it would probably never have come to anyone's attention had not another incident in the odd chain of events, occurred.

The foreman, Peter Dushanyi, was found a few months later, dead in his room, by his own hand. And he left a note which was a confession of the murder of Domana Karic. This naturally was a surprise to everyone, but more surprising was the explanation, Dushanyi gave for his deed.

He wrote: "I, Peter Dushanyi, Keeper of the Sacred Flame (evidently, the furnace) am the embodiment of the sacred vampire of Tothe, and because my god requested sacrifice, I have complied with his command. Domana Karic, was in himself, nothing, but I chose him because he was at the furnace while I was there. I killed him and I am glad to have done it; the furnace needed a soul to keep it content. I provided it. I am taking my own life because my purpose on Earth has been fulfilled."

That was all there was to the note. When the story circulated around the plant, workers refused to approach the furnace believing that the soul of Karic inhabited it. In fact, the factory closed shortly thereafter due to the impossibility of getting sufficient help. The major oddity about the whole affair is that the police never mentioned, at least for public consumption, that Dushanyi had a slight cut in his throat too.

* * *

Vignettes OF FAMOUS SCIENTISTS

By ALEXANDER BLADE

• THOMAS ANDREWS •

THOMAS ANDREWS, Irish chemist and physicist, was born on December 19, 1813 at Belfast, Ireland, where his father was a linen merchant. He studied medicine and the physical sciences at the University of Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dublin and Paris. In 1845, after practicing as a physician for several years in his native city, he was appointed vice-president of the newly established Queen's college, Belfast, and professor of chemistry, offices which he held till 1879, when failing health compelled his retirement. He then resigned and devoted the rest of his life to research. He died on Nov. 26, 1885.

The work on which his reputation mainly rests, and which best displayed his skill and resourcefulness in experiment, was concerned with the liquefaction of gases. He carried out a very complete enquiry into the laws expressing the relations of pressure, temperature and volume in carbonic dioxide, in particular establishing the conceptions of critical temperature and critical pressure, and showing that the gas passes from the gaseous to the liquid state without any breach of continuity.

When investigating the properties of certain gases, in 1861, he reached the important conclusion that for each one of them there is a definite degree of temperature, or absence of it, above which no amount of pressure will cause it to change into a liquid. Below that figure a gas will sometimes partially liquefy, but precisely at it—called the critical point—it passes at once into the liquid state. This point differs for each gas. Similarly it has since been found that for each of them there is also a definite pressure and temperature figure at which alone the liquid will become a solid. In consequence of this discovery, all the known gases have since been reduced to the liquid condition, and all but helium to that of a solid.

Andrews also made a special study of ozone, and to him is due the most of what is known at the present time of the properties of that substance. Technically considered, it is an allotropic form of the elementary gas oxygen; that is, one of the states which the element can assume without loss of its elementary character, but which is accompanied by marked differences in some of its physical properties. A number of the elements possess this capacity, notably sulphur, phosphorus and carbon, and many chemists hold that allotropism

can occur with any of them, given the proper conditions, inasmuch as it seems to be wholly a molecular phenomenon. The molecule of normal oxygen consists of two atoms (O_2). When in that state it is colorless, tasteless and odorless. If reduced to a liquid it is transparent, displays a faint blue tint, and begins to boil and return to the gaseous form at $181.4^\circ C$. In the solid state it presents a dead white appearance. The molecule of ozone consists of three atoms of oxygen (O_3), possesses a faint bluish color, but also a strong but not unpleasant odor. At $100^\circ C$ it becomes, under the proper pressure, a very deep blue, almost a black, liquid, which begins to boil at the temperature of $106^\circ C$.

OZONE was first observed in 1785 by the Dutch student Van Marum, who produced it undesignedly when passing an electrical current through some oxygen, and detected its peculiar odor. He also noticed that the same effect was always produced in the immediate vicinity of a frictional electric machine. In both cases he concluded that it was "the smell of electricity."

In 1801 the same odor was observed by an English chemist named Cruikshank, who was engaged in decomposing some water by electricity. This time the phenomenon was ascribed to the accidental presence of a little chlorine which, if in very small quantities, has a somewhat similar effect on the olfactory nerves.

Finally, in 1840, the attention of the German chemist, Schonbein, was drawn to the matter, and after a prolonged research he announced in 1845 the discovery of a new gas, giving it the name it now bears. A few years later the French chemist, Soret, demonstrated its true character as merely an allotropic form of oxygen.

Ozone is always present in minute quantities in the atmosphere, and in much larger quantities after a violent thunderstorm, during which it is produced, giving the characteristic fresh and clean effect so noticeable after such a storm has passed away. It is a more powerful oxidizing agent than normal oxygen. Under confinement it will reduce iron, copper, mercury and even silver from the metallic state to that of the oxide, and will rapidly destroy rubber and vulcanite. It is a powerful bleaching agent and germ destroyer. The latter

property is sometimes employed in purifying the air in hospitals. Whenever and wherever the atmosphere produces an exhilarating effect, and impresses one as unusually fresh and clean, it will be found to contain temporarily more than its

average content in ozone. The phenomenon is nature's way of purifying the sea of air we live in when, for any reason, it has become abnormally impure and unhealthful.

* * * * *

• LEONARD EULER •

L EONHARD EULER was born at Basel, Switzerland, April 15, 1707, and is regarded as one of the greatest of the mathematicians. In 1723, at the age of sixteen, he graduated from the university of Basel, where he studied geometry under Jean Bernoulli, at that time one of the first mathematicians in Europe, and became a close friend of his sons, Daniel and Nicolas. After graduation he specialized in his favorite studies with private instructors, devoting also several years to theology, medicine, the Oriental languages and such science as the accumulated knowledge of the day provided.

At the age of twenty, and at the invitation of the Empress of Russia, Catherine I, Euler joined his friends in St. Petersburg, and became an associate of the Academy of Sciences there, serving first as a teacher of physics, then of mathematics, and finally inspector of the geographical department. The severity of the climate and close application to study affected his health and in 1735 he lost the sight of one eye, and about thirty years later became totally blind. In spite of his severe handicap he was, throughout his life, a persistent, undaunted and weariless investigator and teacher.

In 1741 Euler went to Berlin at the command of Frederick the Great, and during the next twenty-five years contributed many memoirs to the Prussian Academy. During this period he continued to contribute memoirs to the academy of St. Petersburg, and in 1766 he obtained, though with difficulty, permission to return to Russia. Soon afterwards a cataract formed in his left eye, which left him almost blind; with the help of his sons and of Kraft and Lexell, however, he continued his work. In the next seven years he sent in 70 memoirs to the Academy, and left in his papers some 200 more. He remained in St. Petersburg, an honored member of the faculty of the university of that city, until he died of apoplexy on September 18, 1783.

Euler's greatest work was done in pure mathematics and he must be regarded as one of the founders of the modern science. His writings on mathematical subjects were remarkably numerous and are regarded of the highest value, for he possessed a style of unusual clearness and easy intelligibility. Partial and even complete blindness did not lessen his mental vigor. When the latter misfortune overtook him, he employed as an amanuensis a young German who was, by trade, a tailor, and whose mathematical education had never progressed beyond the fundamentals. To him he

dictated his remarkable "Introduction to Algebra," in terms so clear and simple that his assistant, as the work advanced, became an expert algebraist.

EULER treated trigonometry as a branch of analysis. He introduced, at the same time as Thomas Simpson, the abbreviations now used for the trigonometric functions and made use of the symbols ϵ and π . He made many investigations which were new in his time; he discussed the general equation of the second degree in three dimensions, and classified the surfaces represented by it; he showed that the conic sections were represented by the general equation of the second degree in two dimensions.

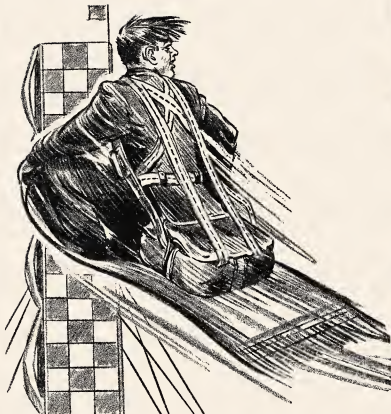
Euler carried his great mathematical faculties into the domain of physics. He was the first to deduce the equation of the curve of vibration in the phenomena of light rays, and to demonstrate their relation to, and dependence on the properties of density and elasticity in the medium that carried them—the ether of space. As a corollary from this, he showed mathematically that in the phenomenon of refraction it was the rays of greater length—those towards the red end of the spectrum—that underwent the smallest rate of dispersion in passing through the prism. In the face of the statement by the great Newton that a correction of chromatic aberration was unattainable, he investigated the subject so deeply and thoroughly, that he was able at the end to write a prescription under which Dollond, the distinguished English optician and instrument maker, was able to construct a combination of lenses of different qualities of glass, which were practically achromatic.

Although Euler's most important work was done in pure mathematics he was a man of wide culture, interested in many branches of applied mathematics and science. He made important contributions to astronomy, hydrodynamics and optics. In versatility of keen mental powers Euler ranks with Leonardo Da Vinci. Of all the great mathematicians that have arisen to date in the records of the science, he was preeminent in the faculty and habit of using that wonderful tool in solving practical problems in the arts. For example, he developed a method of determining longitude at sea, which brought him a share of the £20,000 prize offered by the British Parliament, the balance going to the instrument maker, Harrison, who constructed a chronometer sufficiently accurate to be used for the same purpose, the one checking the results indicated by the other.

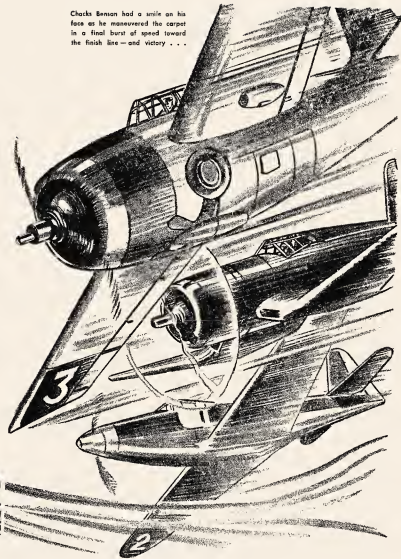
AIR RACE

by Warren Kastel

The race officials had a great problem. It seemed that the rules failed to cover a flying carpet . . .



Chacks Benson had a smile on his face as he maneuvered the carpet in a final burst of speed toward the finish line — and victory . . .



CHOCKS Benson paced his living room carpet with the fervent conviction that all the woes in the world had been wrapped into a single bundle and dumped upon his shoulders. Though not a perceptible bundle, it weighed him down so heavily that he groaned with every step.

Tomorrow was the date of the Niles City Air Race, and Chocks would be unable to compete. For some human snake had taken a wrench and with it played a ghoulisn tune upon the motor of Chock's plane. And the plane, as it now lay in the hangar at the airport, would never fly again.

Chocks groaned. If he could enter that race, he knew he'd have a good chance of winning the \$5000 first prize. With that money he could open a little flying school of his own. And more than that, he would be able to marry Pat Andrews, who, according to the general consensus of opinion, was the prettiest little waitress that had ever taken an order at the Niles City Airport lunchroom.

But his plane was now just a hulk of girders and cloth from which the life had flown. And that fact summed up all his troubles. For, without a plane he couldn't enter the race. If he didn't enter the race, he wouldn't win the prize. If he didn't win the prize, he wouldn't be able to open up a flying school. And, without a flying school, he wouldn't be able to marry Pat Andrews.

Chocks kicked at the living room carpet, and because he was too preoccupied with the troubles, didn't see the carpet twitch remonstratingly. For a second he had imagined that the carpet was Bert Stevens, and that he was treating a certain portion of Steven's pants in the manner he had always longed to treat them. Bert Stevens was the thorn in the side of Chocks' life.

Stevens too was an aspirant for the hand of Pat Andrews, and though he had nothing in the way of looks and personality to recommend him, he had a lot of influence in his pocketbook.

For Bert Stevens was the son of Horace M. Stevens, and the name of Horace M. Stevens is synonymous with oddles of money. Horace M. Stevens owned a shoe factory up near Carlsville, the bank in Niles City, and several other things too numerous to mention. Suffice it to say that he had plenty in the way of cash.

Chocks knew that Bert was entering the race solely to see that he didn't win. \$5000 dollars was just a nice little wad of pin money to Bert Stevens. Stevens no doubt hoped that the ignomony of losing would prejudice Pat against Chocks.

Chocks felt the load of woe upon his shoulders settle deeper. There was nothing he could do. He couldn't beg, borrow, or steal a plane, for every one for miles around would be entered in the race. And he knew, moreover, that he'd never be able to get a plane as fast as his had been.

Before him Chocks saw stretching a desolate vista, totally devoid of life and happiness. He'd never be anything more than a mere grease monkey tinkering with motors at some airport. Some airport, for after Pat was married to Bert Stevens he wouldn't want to remain around Niles City where the iron would constantly be driven deeper into his soul.

Chocks stopped and slammed a fist into the palm of his hand. "Oh, Lord," he moaned, "if I could only fly in the race tomorrow. . . If I could only fly."

CHOCKS was standing on the carpet when he said that. The carpet twitched. The edges curled up. It shud-

dered and gave a preliminary heave.

The next thing Chocks knew, he was being borne aloft toward the ceiling. His head banged against plaster with stunning force, and he yelled in confusion.

"Hey! Hey—what the. . ."

The edges of the carpet were pressing against the ceiling, and Chocks was wrapped with all the comfort of a bug in a rug. But with none of the bug's peace of mind.

"Hey! Let me down!"

The carpet floated down from the ceiling, and came to rest with feather softness upon the floor. Chocks scrambled to his feet, and bounced off the carpet. He stood on the other side of the living room, his jaw hanging open.

"N-n-now w-wha-what t-th the hell?" Chocks muttered.

But the carpet lay quietly on the floor as good carpets should, and for a moment Chocks was tempted to dismiss his recent escapade as a hallucination. The bump on his head, however, kept him convinced that it had all been perfectly real.

Not taking his eyes from the carpet, Chocks sidled to a chair and sank down. He stared at the carpet. It was an old, frayed and tattered carpet, and whatever design it might have had had gone with the passing of years and the rubbing of feet. The sole distinction it yet possessed was its Arabian ancestry. Chocks remembered the day his father brought it home from an auction, and his mother's tirade which had followed. The carpet had lain in the attic neglected for many years, and only recently had Chocks brought it down to cover the worn spot in the living room rug.

And now, Chocks reflected, the carpet had taken a bite out of the hand which had taken care of it. The carpet lay on the floor quietly, showing no fur-

ther indication of animation. At last Chocks got up enough nerve to creep up and peer at it narrowly. Still it remained lifeless, and to all indications perfectly harmless.

He pressed the toe of a shoe upon it gingerly, but the carpet didn't move in retaliation. Chocks felt a momentary surge of disgust. Why he had walked on this very carpet for years, and now was acting as if it were some monster ready to spring at him.

Chocks tightened his lips and stepped upon the carpet. Watching it closely, he said:

"Up."

The carpet went up. It rose with an enthusiasm that threw Chocks to hands and knees. Midway between floor and ceiling, it hovered.

Chocks swallowed his heart back to where it belonged, and turned over so that he could sit down. He began to grin.

"Giddy-up," he said. "Easy now—"

The carpet circled the living room like a soaring swallow. It dipped and curved with surety and ease. It rivaled the grace of any airplane Chocks had ever flown.

His grin grew to a broad smile. Bert Stevens was far from having the edge on him yet.

"Whoa!" Chocks commanded imperiously.

The carpet settled down on the floor again, and Chocks strode off. The burden of woes had disappeared from his shoulders.

For tomorrow would find him in the Niles City air race. . . .

CHOCKS arrived at the airport a half hour ahead of time. He carried the carpet under his arm and he was whistling.

Already the stands had begun to fill and from the looks of things there

would be a capacity crowd. Some of the planes were already on the line and mechanics were busily engaged in giving final tunings to powerful motors. Chocks sidled along the hangers until he came to the hanger where his plane was. Pat Andrews was there, waiting for him.

"Hello, Chocks," she said, a pitying look in her eyes. "Your mechanic told me what happened, and I'm awful sorry. I know how much this race meant to you."

"Sorry?" Chocks asked gaily. "Why?"

"Why?" the girl cried in astonishment. "How can you race now that your plane has been wrecked?" Her voice softened, "I wonder who could have done such a nasty thing?"

"Doesn't matter." Chocks said indifferently, "I've got another plane." He touched the carpet under his arm.

"You've got another plane?" said Pat in surprise. "Why that's marvelous! Where did you get it and where's it at?"

"Got it from the parlor, and it's right here." Chocks grinned at her.

"Here? Parlor?" A frown crept over her pretty face. "But I don't understand."

Chocks held the carpet in front of him. "This is my plane," he said. "And it's going to win the race for me this afternoon."

The girl's mouth dropped ever so slightly. The frown on her forehead increased and she looked at Chocks with the wary regard one gives to an inmate of the state asylums.

"No, I'm not crazy, Pat—I'm dead serious. This innocent little carpet actually can fly."

Pat didn't say anything. She couldn't find anything to say. Her eyes, however, plainly said that the sudden loss of Chocks' chance to take part in the

air race had unbalanced him.

Just then Bert Stevens rounded the corner of Chocks' hanger. He was grinning.

"Hi folks!" the grin on his face widened. "Sorry to hear about your plane, Chocks. Too bad, too bad!"

Chocks lost a little of his carefree manner. He was thinking just then that if anyone had ruined his motor it was Bert Stevens.

"Yeah," he said drily, "Too bad, isn't it? It's pretty plain that the rat who did it didn't want me to win. He must have been pretty yellow to do a thing like that." He let the words sink in, and they did. Stevens' face turned just the slightest tinge red. Then Chocks added: "But it won't do the skunk any good. I've got another plane and it's a damned sight faster than my old one!"

"You've got another plane? . ." Stevens frowned bewilderedly.

"Yep." Chocks drawled.

"But—but where's it at?" Stevens echoed puzzledly. "It's not on the starting line."

"It will be," said Chocks, and he noticed that Pat was looking at Stevens with raised eyebrows. It didn't take long for him to catch on. Now they both thought he was cracked. Stevens laughed and clapped Chocks on the back.

"Well, I'll be lookin' for you on the line!" he said, his voice edged with sarcasm, and he walked off laughing.

Chocks looked at Pat. Pat looked at Chocks. Then she shook her head and grasped his arm.

"Don't take it so hard, Chocks," she said, you musn't let this get you down. There'll be other races."

"Yeah, after I win this one," Chocks said.

The girl shrugged hopelessly and walked away. Then Chocks grinned

after her and strode towards the Judges' stand to check in . . .

THERE were fourteen sleek ships on the starting line. They stood in an even line along the tarmac. But there was a noticeably empty space in their ranks. The space where Chock's plane should have been.

The race was scheduled to start in five minutes when Chocks made his way towards the lineup. A murmuring arose from the crowd when they saw him. Word had spread that he wouldn't be able to race. But there he was, striding across the Field with a bundle under his arm. The puzzled murmuring of the crowd grew louder.

Reaching his position Chocks dropped the bundle to the ground and swiftly unrolled it. The crowd gasped as they saw it was a carpet. Chocks sat down and peeled off his coat.

Chocks knew he made a ludicrous figure sitting in the middle of a line of airplanes, upon nothing more substantial than a mass of woven wool. But he was not daunted. Hadn't they laughed at the Wright Brothers?

Chocks glanced around him. Pilots were smirking in their planes and pointing at him in derision. Off to one side there was a heated discussion going on in the Judges' booth. Chocks knew who they were discussing. Suddenly one of them climbed down the platform and made his way towards the line. He was a pompous little man boasting the remnants of what had once been a prolific head of hair. It was Horace M. Stevens, Bert Stevens' father. He waddled importantly up to Chocks.

"What's the meaning of this, Benson?" he demanded. "Are you trying to make a farce out of this race!"

Chocks sighed. "Look, Stevens," he said, managing to keep his voice even, "I've paid my entry fee, been granted

a position in the lineup, and am in my spot on time. I don't think there's anything else I'm supposed to do?"

"But good heavens, man, this is an airplane race—not an Arabian festival. You're not only making yourself ridiculous but the whole commission as well!"

"To hell with the commission," Chocks said hotly. "Get back to your own side of the tracks. If I want to make a fool of myself, that's my business!"

Horace Stevens glared at Chocks then shrugged and turned to waddle back to the Judging stand.

A hush settled over the grandstand as the starter signalled contact. There was a thundering roar as fourteen powerful motors burst into life. Wind screamed from the backwash and flattened the grass behind them. The spectators tensed. The moment was at hand.

There was an amused but puzzled smile on every face as they looked at the insignificant figure of Chocks, sitting astride a worn little carpet in the center of the field. The starter raised his flag and counted the seconds on his watch.

The hum of the motors was a steady roar. Then the flag flashed down!

Throttles burst into life and the planes began to move forward. Slowly at first, and then with gathering speed. But something suddenly shot past them.

The carpet rose with the ease of a feather and shot ahead like a bullet gone berserk. It was a half mile in the heavens before a single plane had left the ground. Chocks chuckled. Chocks laughed. Chocks roared. He gripped the sides of the tattered rug and yelled in wild abandonment. Then he glanced downwards.

The rest of the planes had taken the air now and were circling for altitude.

Chocks could see the amazed faces of their pilots. In particular Chocks noted the incredulous look upon the face of Bert Stevens. He had the look of a baby having gained possession of a large sucker was suddenly deprived of it. Then, with a savagery, the race was on.

From the moment it started, until the moment it stopped the end was apparent. Chocks flew like a bat out of hell in any and all directions at the same time. He flew with a recklessness that brought gasps to the throats of the crowds below. He looped and turned, and dove and twisted. He cut in and out of the other ships like a wasp on a spree. He circled above them and came flashing down with the speed of a comet. He missed propellers by inches and came closer to the whirling props at every turn. He would spurt ahead with a speed that made the other ships look like crawling insects. Then he would turn and race back a mile to repeat the performance. His hair flew wildly about him in disarray. His clothes were flattened against his body in the savage pull of the wind. He clung to the carpet with the tenacity of a leech.

Then, when there was scarcely a mile to go, he suddenly shot forward and dove towards the finish line. He landed as lightly as a feather and rose to watch the other ships come in. Bert Stevens was the first to land by a good lap ahead of the others. But Chocks had found time to light a cigarette and was walking toward the Judges' stand to collect the first prize before Stevens' ship had even touched the ground.

"I PROTEST!" thundered Bert Stevens. "That race wasn't fair! This was supposed to be an airplane race—there was no provision made for flying rugs!"

Bedlam ensued. There was a huge crowd around the Judges' stand watching the heated argument that was in progress.

"I entered this race fairly and was accepted!" Chocks retorted. "And besides there are no provisions in the rules which prohibit a flying carpet! They don't even specify that entrants must see an airplane—but just fly!"

"Why should they?" Stevens demanded. "What else besides an airplane would be in an air race?"

"I guess I showed you that." Chocks answered drily. "And since I won I demand my prize!"

"But you didn't win fairly!" Stevens shouted. Then a crafty gleam entered his eyes. "I'll race you alone in planes, then we'll see who'll come in first!"

Chocks saw the strategy behind Stevens' words. He knew as well as did Stevens that he would have no chance of winning in such a race. Stevens' plane had proved its superiority over the others. It was a trap that Chocks knew he must avoid.

The Judges went into consultation. Horace M. Stevens was conspicuous in the debate. His pudgy arms waved continually. And he seemed to be winning his point. Suddenly he approached the loudspeaker. The crowd silenced expectantly.

"The results of the race, because of their, er—unusual circumstances, have given rise to the question of validity." He paused to mop his forehead. He was having a hard time finding words. Then: "We have decided that the only way to settle this matter is to have the two leading contestants engage in a separate race to decide the winner." The crowd cheered. They were looking for more thrills. Horace M. Stevens waved his arms.

"Chocks Benson will be given his

choice of the remaining planes, and. . .” He didn’t get any further. Chocks suddenly shoved him aside and addressed the crowd.

“I refuse to fly any plane with Bert Stevens! He knows that his ship is faster than any other on the field—he knows he can beat me without even trying that way. I won the race today fairly. If any other race is to be run it should be on an equal basis. Since the protest has been entered against my carpet and not me—then we’ll let the carpet be the deciding factor!”

The crowd thundered its approval. This was just the thing crowds like to have happen. Chocks roared into the microphone.

“We’ll cut the carpet in half and each of us will take a piece. Then we’ll run the race over, and the winner will get the prize!”

A blast of approval greeted Chocks’ words.

Bert Stevens turned helplessly to his father. Horace M. Stevens turned to the Judges.

They argued.

They argued some more.

But the crowd kept up its thunder. They knew what they wanted now, and they wouldn’t give in. The Judges looked at the crowd and look at Horace M. Stevens. They decided that it was one against a couple thousand enthusiastic spectators, and the spectators were the stronger. The Judges gave in.

Chocks carried the carpet down to the field and someone produced a pair of scissors. He cut the rug in two. Then he arose and gave Bert Stevens one of the halves.

Stevens was pale as he took the piece of carpet. There was a bewildered look upon his face.

“H-how does the thing work?” he stammered.

Chicks’ grin widened. “When you

want to go up, say up. When you want to go down, say down. The carpet will go where you tell it to. That’s all there is to it.”

Stevens, paling, mumbled something like: “—up—down—up—”

The crowd was getting restless as Chocks placed his portion of carpet on the tarmac. Stevens, in a daze, followed suit.

Chocks sat down and calmly folded his arms. Beside him Bert Stevens was clutching his portion with a desperate grip. Stevens’ face was turning a delicate green.

HORACE T. STEVENS was still remonstrating with the Judges, but they, since they included the Mayor of Niles City, a would-be mayor of Niles City, and the Sheriff and a would-be sheriff of Niles City, remained adamant. Election time was near, and they knew that if their popularity at the polls was to be assured, they’d have to please the people.

“Start the race!” the crowd was yelling.

“On with the race!”

“Hurry up!”

The Judges nodded and beamed and sat back in their seats. Horace M. Stevens shrunk within his fat, and threw a look of despair at Bert.

The starter’s gun was raised in the air. His eyes were glued to his stop watch.

Boom!

The rugs leaped into the air, and Stevens in spite of his frenzied clutch upon the edges, was almost torn off as the wind gripped at him. He yelled in fear.

The crowd, demanding action, yelled in derision. Horace M. Stevens moaned.

Chocks circled leisurely while Bert Stevens learned to manage his portion of carpet. At last the other caught the

knack, and Chocks, deciding that from now on Stevens was on his own, took off in earnest.

He bent low on the carpet, the wind whistling past his ears. The ground below him was a dim brown blur. He neared the first pylon, and even as the sight of it registered on his eyes, he was around and past it. The carpet seemed to know everything that was supposed to be done.

As he rounded the next pylon, Chocks looked back to see how Bert Stevens was coming on. Stevens had himself wrapped around his piece of carpet so that little of anything of it could be seen. His eyes were closed and his teeth were clicking like castnets.

Chocks hovered a moment over the grandstand and waved gaily to the yelling, shrieking throngs. Then he lined out for the home pylon, circled it, and came swooping down to earth.

It was some minutes before Bert Stevens landed. When he did, he crawled slowly from his rug, and quietly consigned his recent lunch to the ground.

The spectators swept all around Chocks, cheering and yelling. The judges wormed their way importantly through the crowd, beaming benignantlly. When a space had been cleared about Chocks, and when the yelling had died down sufficiently to enable them to be heard. The Mayor began a nice speech, and when it was finished, he proudly presented Chocks with the \$5000 prize. Horace M. Stevens was to have presented the prize, but had changed his mind.

Chicks stammered out his thanks and turned to look for Pat. She was at the outer fringes of the crowd, and the expression on her face made Chocks go warm inside. He told himself that she

would be the first student at his new flying school—after they were finally married.

"Wait! Wait, I protest!" Bert Stevens had swayed to his feet and was staggering toward Chocks and the Judges.

Suddenly Chocks' eyes narrowed. As Bert Stevens had stood up, a small bright object had fallen from his disarranged clothing. Chocks recognized it instantly for a small, very expensive part of his wrecked plane!

A river of wrath surged through him. So it was Bert Stevens who had destroyed his plane after all! And Stevens had shown himself to be mercenary enough to steel that expensive metal part besides.

Chocks leaped forward and scooped the metal object from the ground. Holding it up for all to see, he roared:

"You all know that someone wrecked my plane to prevent me from taking part in the race. See this gadget? It came from my plane, and the other mechanics can prove it. It came from Bert Stevens' pocket!"

The crowd eyed Bert Stevens and muttered ominously. The Sheriff ceased to be a judge and stepped forward to uphold the dignity of his office. He did it with gusto, considering all the votes he would get by so doing.

"Bert Stevens, I arrest you in the name of the law! You are charged with malicious property damage. Better come with me, and quietly."

"Go to hell!" Bert Stevens snarled. "My father—"

He was standing on Chocks' portion of carpet when he said that. He never completed the rest. For suddenly it leaped up into the sky. In a moment Bert Stevens and the rug were vanishing dots.

The carpet was being obliging . . .

THE END

READER'S PAGE

WAUKEGAN SOS

Sirs:

This is an SOS. Is there anybody in Waukegan, Illinois, or vicinity, who is interested enough in stf to want to correspond with me? I'm being assailed on all sides by friends (such as they are) for filling my mind with "that trash", and it's getting kind of lonesome all by myself.

Although I'm a novice in the field, I'll do my best to keep up an interesting correspondence.

I am also interested in the Shaver Mystery. If I joined and sent in my dollar subscription now could I get the back issues of the club magazine? Hope to hear from somebody soon.

James Stewart,
821 Massena Ave.,
Waukegan, Ill.

Come on, you Waukegan fans—get on the ball! As as to the Shaver Mystery Club and its slick little club magazine, we'd suggest that you send your subscription to the Club at 2414 Lawrence Avenue, Chicago. We're sure that Chet Geier will be glad to have you join, and in all likelihood he will still have a few back issues to bring you up to date on the club's affairs. . . ED.

LEE FRANCIS IS TOPS

Sirs:

Here I am again, and the only way you are going to get away from me is to stop putting such dog-gone good stories in FA. Then, and only then, will I stop reading FA. AMAZING is a close second, but can't top or tie FA with me.

Here's how I rate the stories in the April issue—a swell issue.

1. "Flight Into Fog" by Lee Francis. This is only the third story by Lee Francis that I have read, but I want to say that she—or—he whoever Lee may be, is super with me!

2. "Lair of the Grimalkin."
3. "Coffin of Life and Death."
4. "The Wandering Swordsman."
5. "The Curse of Ra."
6. "The Cat-Snake."
7. "Who Sups With the Devil."

The feature article on herbs was too short. There was much more that could have been covered—like using the thorn weed as a cure for itch, and many others. The features are always interesting, however. I'll see you after I finish reading the next issue of FA.

Zeda P. Mishler,
423 Woodland Ave.,
Johnstown, Pa.

Lee Francis is a "he", Zeda. And we're right with you in saying that we too think he is tops, super, and in every way one fine writer. Along these lines, keep your eye on FA for a new novel coming up by Lee Francis. It's a dilly, and you won't want to miss it. As to the features, you, they are somewhat short, but to cover subjects like that in full detail all at once would be something of a problem. So you'll probably be seeing another article on herbs in the future, covering points that were untouched in the first article. Anyway, we're glad you find the features interesting reading. Some of our readers like them almost as well as the stories. And we'll be waiting for your next letter. ED.

OUR BEST NOVEL YET

Sirs:

I have just finished reading Lawrence Chandler's "Forgotten Worlds" in the May FA. I want to say it is without a doubt the best novel you have yet published in either of your two fine books, AS or FA. I personally rate it over the works of Howard Browne—his "Warrior of the Dawn", and Nelson Bond's "Sons of the Deluge."

As you can see, I'm a very rabid reader of your two magazines. I have issues dating back to 1939. . . . But now I have a bone to pick.

How can you rate the works of Richard S. Shaver with writers like Nelson Bond, Howard Browne, Don Wilcox, Stanley C. Weinbaum, Leroy Yerxa, Eando Binder, Frank Patton, and Edgar Rice Burroughs? I can't stand his stories. No doubt all the Shaver fans will demand my blood, and perhaps you will too, but this is my opinion, and I have the right to express it.

This is my first letter to any magazine, but maybe I'll have beginner's luck in having it printed. Anyway, I hope so.

Harvey Morgan,
2237 Park Place,
Wichita 4, Kansas.

We're very glad you liked Lawrence Chandler's novel so well, Harvey. It's gratifying to know that we can pick new writers who will ring the bell like Chandler, with you readers. Unfortunately we didn't have room this issue for other letters on the May issue, but we'll try and make up for that next issue. As for Shaver, well, all we can say is that Dick is very popular with a lot of our readers. You must admit one thing however, that Shaver has really stirred up a controversy both pro and con. ED,



PREACHING TO FISH

★ By FRANCES YERXA ★

THE Kwakiuti Indians of British Columbia think that when a salmon is killed its soul returns to the salmon country. So they are careful to throw the bones and waste material back into the sea where the soul can go back into them at the resurrection of the salmon. If they burned the bones the soul would be lost and it would be impossible for the salmon to arise from the dead. The Ottawa Indians of Canada believe that souls of dead fish pass into other bodies of fish, so they never burn fish bones for fear of offending the souls of fish and they would not come into their nets. The Hurons don't throw fish bones in the fire because the souls of the fish would warn other fish not to be caught because their bones would be burned. They also employ men to preach to the fish, persuading them to come and be caught. A good preacher was much in demand for they thought that he had great power in drawing the fish to their nets. In the Huron fishing village there was an especially eloquent preacher. Every night after the evening meal, he had all the people sitting silently in their places while he preached to the fish. His main text was that the Hurons would never burn fish bones. He invited and pleaded with the fish to come and be caught, and to fear nothing because they would be serving their friends who honored them and did not burn their bones. In German New Guinea an enchanter is employed to lure the fish to their doom. He stands in a canoe on the beach with a decorated fish basket, and orders the fish to come from all parts of the sea. When the Aino have killed a sword fish,

they thank the fish for allowing them to catch him and invite him to come again.

Among the Nootka Indians of British Columbia, it was a rule that anyone that had eaten bear's flesh must not eat fish for at least two months. They believed that fish of all kinds, even though a great distance away would come to know of it, and be so offended that they would not allow themselves to be caught by any of the inhabitants. When the herring disappeared from the sea around Heligoland in 1530, the blame was placed on two boys who had whipped two freshly caught herring and then flung them back into the sea. Scotch fishermen believe that if blood is spilled into the sea as a result of a quarrel, the herring will leave that port and not return again that season. West Highland fishermen believe that every shoal of herring has its leader which it follows wherever he goes. This leader is bigger than the other fish, and if a fisherman happens to catch it, he very carefully puts him back into the sea. It would be considered treason to destroy royal fish.

The natives of the Duke of York Island each year decorate a canoe with flowers and ferns, fill it with shell money, and set it adrift to compensate the fish for their brothers who have been caught and eaten. When the Tarabumates of Mexico are going to poison the waters of a river in order to stupefy the fish so they can be caught, they first make offerings to the master of the fish by way of payment for the fish of which they are about to relieve him. The offering consist of axes, knives, beads, and blankets which are hung on a horizontal bar in the middle of the river. The master of the fish,

however, does not have long to enjoy these offerings, for the next morning the owners of articles reclaim them and put them back into use. It is always necessary to treat the first fish caught with much consideration in order to conciliate the rest of the fish, whose conduct may be supposed to be

influenced by the reception given to those of their kind which were the first to be taken. So the Maoris always put back into the sea, the first fish caught with a prayer that it may tempt other fish to come and be caught.

* * *

THE OLYMPIAN MUSES

★ By CHARLES RECOUR ★

THE Greeks have made many contributions to our civilization. The offerings they have given our culture are immeasurable, and among the things the ancient Greeks evolved, nothing is more beautiful than their system of mythology. All the peoples of the world have given us mythological stories and beliefs, but none have stressed the aspect of beauty in them as have the ancient Greeks. The ideal of Grecian life was beauty, pure unadulterated beauty that would stir man to his very core. This intense love of beauty then is reflected in the Grecian stories of their gods.

A particularly effective series of stories concern the Muses. The Muses were the nine daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne. They were beautiful and talented and the world of the arts and sciences was their scope. Everyone honored them and wherever feasts or celebrations were held, offerings and libations were made to the Muses. Their function was to inspire Man with the ideas that produced his noblest thoughts in art and science, poetry and literature. Even today we say "that we have been inspired by the Muse" when we have done something outstanding in these fields.

Calliope, the most highly regarded of the Muses, reigned over song and poetry. She appears as a beauty with a pencil and a slate. *Clio*, the next, was the Muse of history, and she carried a roll of parchment on which were inscribed the events of the known world. *Melpomene*, was the Muse of Tragedy, and she wears a tragic mask. *Thalia*, the comedienne, carries a comic mask. *Polyhymnia*, of the sacred hymns, wears a wreath of laurel. *Terpsichore*, whom we all know as the goddess of the dance, appears playing a seven-stringed lyre. *Urania*, the goddess of astronomy, carries a celestial sphere. *Euterpe*, goddess of harmony, hears always a flute. *Erato*, the Muse of love, is always depicted wearing a laurel and playing a lyre. These then were the representations of the Muses.

While they were worshipped indiscriminately by both gods and mortals alike, and while their origin was basically in beauty, as in all legends, there runs through their activities the inevitable streak of cruelty. Perhaps this was in contrast. Regardless, they did some unpleasant things at times.

For example, on earth, there was a Thracian bard of great renown, named *Thamyris*. Being an accomplished artisan, he foolishly challenged the Muses to a contest of skill. The Muses however were vain beyond all reason, of their abilities and that a mere human should dare to compare himself with them was intolerable! They acceded to the trial, and as would be expected, they vanquished him. Not content with this, they caused his blindness and to top things off they deprived him of his ability to sing! There was vengeance with a capital Vee.

The daughters of King *Pierus*, mere mortal creatures also invited the Muses to a contest. On Mount *Helicon*, these bold creatures fought their battle of beauty with the nine Muses. But the gods looked on enraged. While these mortals sang, the skies darkened and lightning filled the sky. When the Muses entered their offering, however, the whole of Nature became overjoyed and even the Mount writhed with ecstasy. The daughters of *Pierus* were not to get off easily for their audacity. The Muses had them changed into singing birds as a punishment. The Sirens, those women whose lower extremities were formed like birds of the sea, and who had wings, were also equipped with magnificent voices with which they lured sailors to their deaths on the rocks. In fact they were the personification of the rocks along the seashore. With this ability, they, too, tried to challenge the Muses. They made an error. Not only were they soundly trounced, but they were stripped of the feathers which adorned them.

From these various tales it can be seen that though the Greeks adorned their legendary gods and goddesses with great beauty and with great ability, and though they believed that beauty was an end in itself, they still could not resist the injection of little cruelties here and there.

Nevertheless we can forgive them for that. Their contributions to beauty far outweigh those to cruelty. It is impossible for a lover of nature to walk in the woods, listening to the sighing of the wind through the trees or the rustling of a brook without thinking—perhaps against his better judgment—that these are really the voices of the ancient Grecian gods and that the forests are haunted with their long-gone presence.



WEIRD SACRIFICE

★ By JUNE LURIE ★

CLAYTON L. LENNINGS was an amateur anthropologist and as such his word never carried much weight with the scientific world, but his findings, reported in the *Peruvian Journal* and in a number of American newspapers, make interesting speculation. Lennings, who is still quite active in the field, is at present back in South America with the same firm that he worked for before the war. It is possible that he may have something more to report.

Lennings originally went to Peru as the representative of an American manufacturing firm in 1938. He stated that the work was not arduous and left him free for pursuing his favorite hobby, a more than somewhat dabbling in anthropology. He visited a number of libraries and became interested in a little known tribe of head-hunting Indians, the Gyotos. It was a trip to the interior of Peru, during which he naturally left Lima, that gave him his opportunity to do some real field work.

His trip brought him to a small but productive copper mine located in the depths of the Peruvian jungle. His job was to attempt to convince the manager of the mine to persuade his employers to buy some floatation mining equipment to further increase the productivity of their mine.

One evening Lennings, left the camp, and armed with a rifle and a flashlight, he decided to make a nocturnal jungle trip in the near vicinity at least, with the hope of perhaps contacting some of the odd Indian tribes the area was rumored to possess. The mining camp was easy to locate being marked by a hundred foot antenna with a light on top of it. Lennings had

no fear of getting lost. He had gotten no farther than ten or twelve miles from the camp, when he stumbled into a small clearing about three hundred feet across. He crept up to it, noting that it was occupied and appeared to be some crude sort of an Indian village. There was a central fire about which not more than thirty or forty Indians were gathered, and some sort of activity was being engaged in by a few near the fire. The remaining Indians seemed to be more spectators or worshippers than anything else. Lennings got near enough to the group to see what was going on.

A stake had been set up near the fire and to it was tied a lovely, nude young Indian girl. She was firmly bound and her mouth was thoroughly gagged so that she could make no outcry. A savagely painted priest or witch-doctor of sorts, was thrusting thorns into the skin all over her body and her writhings apparently pleased the Indians for they were before the tableau definitely like worshippers. Later, Lennings admitted how foolish he had been even thinking of doing anything about rescuing her, but he was a white man trained in the morals of western civilization and he had to. Rifle in hand, he strode right into the middle of the group, and in the few words of Indian dialect that he knew he told them to break it up and stop it.

For a moment they were all too startled to do anything, but they had had contact with white men before and evidently knew what a rifle was like for they did not rush him. Instead the priest, or chief, or whatever he was, barked some rapid words to the angry Indians who by now

had crept up close to Lennings. They did not attack him, and for his part he did no more than menace them with the rifle. Without much palaver, the chief or priest reached over to the girl, now half-fainting, cut her bonds, removed her gag and let her stagger out of the circle. Then he simply made it understood that Lanning was to go. Lennings was helpless as far as doing anything else went. He could not take the girl with him and yet he knew that she was certainly doomed if she remained. He decided to leave. With mutterings and imprecations the Indians opened a path for him and Lennings went back to camp. At first the superintendent would hardly believe his story but with a handful of armed men they went back to the spot where Lanning had witnessed what he thought of as "the potential sacrifice." The remains of the camp were there but all traces

of the Indians had vanished. Even the stake had been taken down, indicating that the Indians no doubt knew that they were doing something that was ordinarily frowned on in the best white circles.

Lennings reported the incident to authorities in Lima, Peru, who told him that, while sacrifice was uncommon, weird rites were not, and that as yet things were still in too primitive a state to permit the authorities to properly monitor jungle tribes. Trivial as the event was in retrospect, Lennings says, it left him with the feeling that barbaric rites are probably practiced to a greater degree today than anyone has any idea of. Other professional explorers have confirmed this. That death was intended for the girl, Lennings never doubted—it was just the method that shocked him.

BUSY BEES

★ By CAL WEBB ★

A HONEYBEE hive is a hustling community where their food is stored. There are the workers, drones, and the queen bee. During midsummer an average hive may house 2,000 drones, 50,000 workers, and one queen. A special food called "royal jelly" is fed the queen bee, and the more they feed her, the more eggs she lays. A special crew of workers feed the queen and help her around from one cell to another to lay the eggs. In a single day she may lay 3,000 eggs, each in a separate cell. In spite of all the help she has quite a hard day. Some of the workers watch over the larvae which hatches from the eggs. It has to be fed before it can turn into bees.

The cells vary in size. The smaller are for larvae that will hatch into workers. The workers are female, but they seldom lay eggs. If they should, the eggs would produce drones. The larger cells are made for the larvae that will turn into princesses or queens. If the queen should die, there must be another one to take her place. New queens are also needed to lead off new swarms when the hive becomes over-crowded. Royal jelly is fed to the larvae that is to become queens.

Most of the workers are out gathering honey. They take pollen as well as nectar from the blossoms, being sure that they visit only one kind of blossom in a single trip. As the bees move about from one blossom to another, they lose a bit of pollen from their wings on other blossoms. This pollenization is needed so that the plants can produce seeds that will grow the next season. The workers work so hard that they only live about six weeks during the busy season. Workers born in the fall live through the winter. Drones live about four months and do nothing. Queens live

two or three years, although some have been known to live eight years.

There can be only one queen living peacefully in a hive. When new queens are born during the summer, the old queen may take some of the workers and leave the hive for a new home. When there are several princesses, they fight it out to see who becomes queen. It is a fight to death. Sometimes the old queen is unwilling to give up her home and is successful in holding her position in the hive. In this case the new queens take part of the workers and seek new homes. If they refuse to leave, the mother queen may kill them. She is lacking in motherly love for she is capable of stinging her own children to death.

When honeybees swarm and leave their old hive, they must make a new home. If they don't go into a prepared hive, they will go into a hollow limb, or perhaps, down an old chimney. First they have to make the honey comb from the wax. The wax comes from the bees. After they have loaded up on honey, they hang from the roof of the hive in a long string. One bee holds on to the hind legs of the one above it. A second string is started from another part of the roof of the hive, and the bee at the bottom of that string clings to the lower bee on the first string. They hang in this V shape for a couple days. Very slowly, wax oozes from their abdomens, and they scrape it all up and chew it to make it ready to build honeycomb. It takes a lot of bees to build the comb. Some bring in the wax, others have to shape it into six-sided cells. They begin building from the top, and add more and more cells underneath. Even the most skilled men could not do a neater job.

fantastic

Facts

By LEE OWENS

WYOMING'S SHIP OF DEATH

THREE times a phantom vessel from the misty void between life and death has appeared on the Platte River in Wyoming bearing its message of doom. The strangest mystery of the cattle country, the story of the spectral ship, is related in official reports of the Bureau of Psychological Research at Cheyenne, but the weird accounts of its uncanny appearances do not reveal from what dim port beyond the veil it carries its cargo of dread.

It was in 1862 that the apparition first appeared, according to bureau records. Leon Webber, a government Indian scout and trail blazer, had selected a site near the river and was engaged in building a log cabin. The location in question has been determined as six miles southeast of the present site of the Guernsey Dam, and near the present station of Whalan on the C. B. & Q. Railroad.

Mr. Webber's account follows: "Late in the afternoon of the twelfth of September I was getting ready to return to my summer camp some two miles down the river, when, glancing up the stream, I noticed what appeared to be a gigantic ball of fog riding on the surface of the water, near the middle of the stream. It was a strange sight and, in my excitement, I ran down nearer the bank in order to get a better view of whatever it might be. My dog came and sat down on the ground behind me, and began to whine and whimper as dogs do when there is something at hand they do not understand. When I would change my position, the dog would do likewise, planting himself directly behind me, where he continued to give vent to a peculiar sort of sound; a sound between a squeak and a whine.

"As the huge ball of mist came nearer, I picked up a stone the size of an egg, which I hurled at the floating mass. As the stone left my hand, the balloon-shaped cloud assumed the shape of a sailing vessel of an ancient type. The mast, spars and sails seemed to be sheathed with sparkling frost or ice.

"As I watched the apparition, sounds, apparently produced by the dropping of heavy timbers on the deck, came to my ears with chilling dis-

tinctness. As the sounds ceased, several men in the dress of sailors appeared upon the deck, standing in a circle of close formation.

"After a few moments the sailors on my side of the circle stepped aside, revealing a large square of canvas spread upon the deck, upon which lay the corpse of a young and beautiful girl, whose wrappings were, like the ship, covered with hoarfrost which glittered in the rays of the afternoon sun.

"The ship suddenly veered over to my side of the river—and I recognized the corpse of that of Margaret Stanley, my best girl-friend—we were to have been married early the following spring. 'Margey!' I shouted, preparing to descend to the water.

"At the sound of my voice, ship and sailors instantly vanished from view. Although I remained upon the bank until long after sunset, I saw nothing more of the strange phenomenon. A month later, I visited the Stanley home and was told of Margaret's death, which took place the same afternoon I beheld the Spectral Ship of Death upon the waters of the Platte."

(Signed) Leon Webber.

FROM its mystic harbor the phantom vessel again sailed in the autumn of 1887 and appeared to Gene Wilson, a cattleman. His report to the Cheyenne bureau is as follows:

"While rounding up some stray cattle along the Platte, my dog ran a few rods ahead of me and, while looking up the river, began to raise a terrible rumpus. I was, at the time, some ten miles east of Casper. I tried to ride my horse nearer the bank, but he had evidently seen what the dog was barking at and, try as I would, he could not be made to approach. Throwing the reins over his head, I dismounted, when he gave a loud snort and started to run away. I caught him and tied him to a scrub pine, then approached the bank on foot.

"While gazing out upon the swiftly running water, I saw something that set my nerves atingle. Near the middle of the stream was a full-rigged

(Continued on page 152)



Do Unseen Powers Direct Our Lives?

ARE the tales of strange human powers false? Can the mysterious feats performed by the mystics of the Orient be explained away as only illusions? Is there an intangible bond with the universe beyond which draws mankind on? Does a mighty Cosmic intelligence from the reaches of space ebb and flow through the deep recesses of the mind, forming a river of wisdom which can carry men and women to the heights of personal achievement?

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(Continued from Page 150)

sailing vessel under full sail, yet it did not move at all! It was held back, apparently, by a stern anchor.

"Walking up the bank that I might be opposite the thing, I saw nine men on board who appeared to be sailors. Ship sounds were heard, but they seemed to be coming from the other side of the river, and not from the ship. The man whom I took to be the captain of this strange vessel stood with his arms folded, staring toward the bow of the ship, giving orders to his men without turning his head.

"Stand from under!" came a voice from somewhere among the rigging—but the speaker was hidden from view by the ice-covered sails. As the voice was heard, the sailors on deck instantly removed their caps and stood uncovered, while the ship suddenly veered over to a point not thirty feet from where I was standing. 'Let down!' said the captain without a sign of animation.

"At the captain's command, a square of canvas was lowered to the deck by four ropes attached to its corners. Lying upon the canvas and covered with another piece of frost-laden sailcloth was what I surmised to be a corpse. In this my conclusions were correct. As the sheet came to rest upon the deck, one of the sailors stepped forward and grasping a corner of the sheet, drew it aside, disclosing the face of a woman who seemed to be terribly burned. In spite of the frightfully scarred face, I recognized my wife!

"Overcome with terror, I screamed and covered my eyes. When I looked again, the ship had vanished. After a few moments, I rose and mounted my horse and, with all speed, returned home to relate to my wife what I had seen. Topping a hill a quarter of a mile west of my house, my heart stopped beating; my blood froze in my veins. There, in full view, I discovered my home in ashes! Spurring my horse to a run, I was soon beside the smoldering embers, frantically calling to my wife, who, I was certain, was somewhere within the hearing of my voice.

"Receiving no reply to my repeated calls, I hastened toward the river which ran within a hundred yards of what had been my home, when I came suddenly upon the remains of my wife, burned to death. My supposition is that, upon discovering her clothing to be on fire, she had run toward the river bank, hoping to extinguish the flames by plunging herself into the water."

(Signed) Gene Wilson.

THE spectral ship last appeared on the afternoon of November 20, 1903. Victor Heibe, the witness, was chopping up a fallen tree on the river bank near his home at Bessemer Bend. Several months previously he had defended with his testimony his friend, Thomas Horn, on trial for murder in the criminal court at Cheyenne. But Horn had been convicted of the crime and sentenced to hang. Shortly later the condemned man managed

to escape from the jail with another prisoner, but at the time of the ship's appearance Heibe did not know that Horn had been recaptured.

Pausing in his work to light his pipe, Heibe glanced up the river and noticed a huge ball of fog apparently resting on the surface of the water. The misty mass was slowly moving down the stream, but not as fast as the current was flowing. He glanced at his watch. It was exactly three-fifteen. Suddenly the sounds of excited voices came from the approaching fog-ball.

Then, as the ball drew nearer and grew in size, it began to assume the form of an ancient sailing vessel under full sail, but moving slowly, with every inch of its surface covered with gleaming ice. Several sailors were active on the deck. While Heibe watched, spellbound, a large sheet of canvas was lowered in front of the sailors on the deck. And from behind the canvas voices again drifted across the water.

"All right," said one voice distinctly, "but I am telling you that you are hanging an innocent man."

"That," came a second voice in reply, "is not for us to determine. You were tried and convicted for the murder, and it is our duty to ferry you across. Men, do your duty."

By this time the vapory vessel, slowly moving inshore, had reached a point about twenty feet from shore, the surface of the river being about ten feet below the bank on which Mr. Heibe was standing. And suddenly the sheet of canvas was raised to its former position among the sails revealing a scene of horror on the phantom's deck.

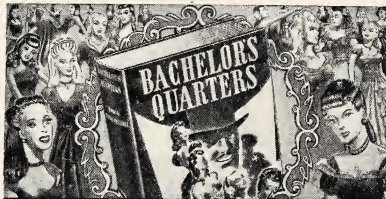
Mr. Heibe's report pictures the grim sight as follows: "On the forward deck just to the rear of the captain, who faced the bow of the craft, stood a gallows of the 'L' type, from whose cross-arms was suspended the body of a man they had just hanged. As the body swayed to and fro from the rocking of the ship, it turned so that I gazed directly into the face. It was the blackened face of my dearest friend—he whom I had defended with my testimony in the court at Cheyenne only a few months previously."

As Heibe stumbled down the river bank, shouting, the ship slowly and silently returned to the middle of the stream and faded from view. Later inquiry revealed that Thomas Horn had been hanged in the jail yard at Cheyenne on the afternoon of the same day. And perhaps it should be added that Mr. Heibe did not know that the phantom vessel had appeared twice before until he was asked by the bureau to file his own account of his weird experience.

Three times the phantom ship of the Platte, under full sail and coated with glittering ice, has emerged from out of the vasty deep. When will it again appear with its tale of gruesome tragedy?

* * * * *

(Continued on Page 154)



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*(Continued from Page 152)***DR. JOHN DEE**

JOHN DEE'S name is associated with the annals of alchemy, in the laboratory of the hermetic researcher, and in the study of the curious. He accomplished very little, and in his futile research he lost his youth, immolated his peace, his reputation; ruined his body and mind, and even prostituted his wife upon the altar of alchemy, and finally passed unmourned into a pauper's grave.

John Dee was born in London in 1527, and from the very beginning, showed a very keen mind. In St. James college he spent about twenty hours a day reading, and when his fellow students would always see his dim light still on at dawn, they started rumors about him. He was shunned and the word "sorcery" was used in connection with his name. This unbearable environment finally was too much for him and he left Cambridge for Louvain, where he found encouragement in his strange work. He returned to England when he was twenty-four, and was received at Court and had a pension of one hundred crowns. He remained there for several years as an astrologer, till he was thrown in prison with a charge of conspiracy and heresy against Queen Mary. He was accused of being a conjuror and a caller of devils. By convincing the Bishop of the orthodoxy of his faith, he was acquitted of both charges. For the next few years, he had an easy time. With Elizabeth on the throne, his fortunes grew. Elizabeth had consulted Dee as to the exact time of Mary's death and also about the date of her coronation. As a philosopher, he enjoyed many privileges among royalty.

DEE'S greatest dream was to bridge the gulf and explore the mystic borderland. He believed that it might be possible for him to hold converse with spirits and angels, and to learn through them the secrets of the universe. He said that one day when he was in deep prayer, the window of his museum glowed with a dazzling light, in the midst of which stood the angel Uriel. The angel smiled graciously and gave him a crystal of convex form telling him that if he wished to communicate with beings of another sphere, he only had to gaze into it, and they would appear and tell him all the secrets of futurity.

Dee's experiments with the crystal were fairly successful, but he was never able to recall any of the revelations made to him. So he decided to confide his secret to another who could look into the crystal and talk with the spirits while Dee, in the corner of the room, could take notes. So he took into his confidence Edward Kelly, the man in the black skull cap. The cap was always worn to conceal the fact that he was without ears. He was accused of forging title deeds, and was pilloried in Lancaster, having both ears cut off,

which was most humiliating to a philosopher. After his trial he fled to Wales and there he led an outdoor life, wandering about the hills in his long black cloak and tightly fitted skull cap with only a bit of his features visible. Kelly came into an inn in Glastonbury Abbey to spend the night. The innkeeper, noting Kelly's interest in ancient writings, produced a manuscript in the old Welsh language that was concerning the transmutation of metals. It had been brought to light when the grave of a bishop in a neighboring church had been molested. There was found the manuscript which the violators were unable to read, and two caskets of ivory, containing respectively, red and white powder, which they thought were valueless. Kelly bought the whole collection for a guinea and believed he had the essentials for the performance of the magnum opus. The manuscript was the book of St. Dunstan, who was the archbishop of Canterbury and was thought to be an alchemist. Kelly took his treasures and went back to London where he went in partnership with Dr. Dee. Spirits appeared to Kelly and they had long discourses which were recorded by Dee. As the men were discussing the transmutation of base metal into pure gold, Kelly claimed that he could do this, and as proof, placed the Glastonbury manuscript and the two caskets before the amazed Dr. Dee. He was intrigued by the glamour of the story and readily financed the schemes of his sordid-minded partner. They worked years trying the transmutation and claimed to have some success. As their funds were running low, they had occasion to meet a wealthy Polish nobleman, Count Albert Laski. Laski admired the accomplishments of Dee and Kelly, who cleverly invited him to one of their private seances. Kelly worked himself up into a frenzy and then stared intently into the crystal. He prophesied to the Count that he would become the fortunate possessor of the philosophers stone, that he was going to live for centuries, and that he would rule Poland. Then he urged Laski to take Dr. Dee and himself back to Poland with him. The scheme worked and in no time Dee and Kelly and their families were living in luxury on Laski's money. They set up great laboratories and commenced operations to turn base metal into pure gold. One experiment after another failed till even Laski's purse began to feel the strain. He had mortgaged his estates till ruination was at hand.

So in 1584, the philosophic leeches dropped off the poor Laski and went out in search of a new victim. The two families went to Bohemia where alchemy was the main topic in Prague. Even the apartment in the Imperial Palace was fitted out as an alchemical laboratory. So you can imagine how well the possessors of St. Dunstan's powders were received. It was reported that Kelly was having absolute success in transmuting and that he had performed one of these operations at the home of the Imperial physician. The truth of the matter was not verified, but for certain, both families

were pulled out of deepest poverty to great wealth. A few months later, for unknown reasons they were asked to leave Bohemia within twenty-four hours. They went from one wealthy family of nobility to another, taking out of each all that they could get. It is said that they spent four years with Count Rosenberg of Trebona. Kelly had told Rosenberg that he would become King of Poland, and would live five hundred years, provided of course that he would supply them with sufficient funds to carry on their experiments.

WHILE they were staying with the count, Kelly and Dee had many arguments, Dee being a weak character, would always give in. Kelly's wife was an ill-tempered, plain looking woman, while Mrs. Dee was very pretty. Kelly bad for long been attracted to Dee's wife, so one day while consulting the crystal, Kelly told Dee that a naked woman had appeared to him and told him that they should share their wives in common. Dee declared that the suggestion was made by a satellite of the Evil One and refused to listen to such instructions. A quarrel took place and Kelly left his associate telling him that he would never come back. Dee was now without a proper medium, and tried out many people including his eight year old son whom he made to look into the crystal for weeks. His thoughts kept returning to Kelly, whom he missed greatly. After some time Kelly did return and Dee felt himself blessed with good-fortune to have a colleague who could so readily communicate with the spirits who had failed to appear for anyone else. When Kelly told him that again the spirit had repeated the command that they should share their two wives in common, the weak philosopher bowed to the evil spirit that insisted upon such a cruel arrangement.

Again the party went to Prague. Rudolph, the Emperor, became so furious at Kelly for not being able to produce that he finally threw him in a dungeon. He gained his liberty by promising to produce the stone if allowed to return to his colleague, Dee. Then Dee's home was made into a prison for Kelly who worked day and night in his futile attempts to compile the Stone of the Philosophers. At last he gave up in despair, and tried to escape. He murdered one of his guards but was caught and sent to the Castle of Zerner.

Dr. Dee and his family set out for England, with great wealth and many coaches and servants. He had previously sent to Queen Elizabeth, a round piece of silver which he claimed he had transmuted from a piece of a brass warming pan. This had the desired effect and he was invited to return to England. The queen told him that nothing should stand in the way of his experiments in alchemical research. Soon he had spent all the money he had accumulated in Prague, but Elizabeth could not believe that he was in want, for after all he was able to make gold from baser metal, and so the only favors she gave him were occasional audiences and her protection. Dee

(Continued on Page 156)

WHY BE AFRAID OF THE DARK?

THERE are two reasons why we fear the dark; one is physical and the other is spiritual. There was good reason for our primitive fathers to become frightened when darkness came. The jungle life awakened and went forth in search of food, and many feasted on men who were frightened by the luminous eyes peering at them through the darkness.

Along with this physical fear was the spiritual fear which was more overwhelming. Even to this day, the superstitious believe that ghosts walk about at night and that the air is filled with demons. Some believed that "vampires" came out of their graves at night and fed on human blood sucked from people while they were sleeping. There were many reasons why people believed that harmful spirits were more apt to be about at night than during the day. The Sun and Earth were believed to be man and wife. This couple required each other to produce living things, but each one could singly transmit power. It was believed that the Sun could impregnate a maiden and become the father of her child. Sometimes this was regarded as a privilege and the saying "Happy the bride that the sun shines on" is a result of this belief. Other people were afraid of the powers of the sun, and a bridal couple were kept under a canopy to prevent a union between the sun and bride.

The Earth was also capable of wonder-working through its power of generation. In old Greek lore there was a giant named Antaeus who was the darling of Earth, his All-Mother. Whenever he touched the ground his strength was unbelievable. During a wrestling match, whenever he was thrown to the ground, his mother, Earth, renewed his vigor and he was invincible. But Heracles was able to conquer him by holding him high in the air where his mother could not reach him, and choking him to death.

Canopies were also used in the case of monarchs who were not allowed to touch the ground with their bare feet, or have the sun shine on their heads. Some countries furnished royal umbrellas. The reason for these precautions was that at that time, holiness and love were the same and holiness was always full of danger. So if the sun or earth came in contact with a flowering maiden or with a monarch, there would be dire results for all concerned. The sun might die out, and the earth become barren, the royalty would become lazy, and young girls would not mature.

Ghosts were believed to walk at night because of the fact that they could not endure the light of the sun. The forces of Life meant light, and death was the mysterious powers of the Darkness. So the sun was blessed by man not only because it made the land and the people on it fruitful, but because it caused the demons, witches, and vampires to flee in confusion.

struggled till his health failed him. He tried his crystal-gazing hut did not do so well without Kelly. He was finally on the verge of starvation and applied to the Queen for relief. She gave him small sums and a position as Warden to the college of Manchester. While Dee was at Manchester, Kelly died in an attempted escape from his dungeon. The death of his lifelong friend and the persecution to which he was subjected at the college caused him to lose his mind. He died penniless in 1608, and was buried near his home.

* * *

THE LITTLE MAN INSIDE

THERE is a new novel out today, "The Indifferent Children," by Andrew Lee, which contains a paragraph well-worth quoting, from a psychological standpoint. The passage goes like this:

"... if he was ever to get to the bottom of fact and experience, if he was ever to kill the little observer inside him, that duplicated self whose prying gaze made his every act vicarious, then he had to separate himself from generalities; he had to concentrate on the fact that the whole can't be greater than the sum of its parts."

Note that phrase, *the little observer inside*. How many of us have been disturbed by that little fellow? Nearly everyone at one time or another has felt, that inside him was or is another self, who stands aside and sort of observes the actions of the person. No matter how intensely a man may apply himself to a task, be it the courting of a girl or the construction of a machine, many times it has been recorded in personal experience, that a part of a man stands aside and notes what is going on. This may be in the form of cynical mental observations such as "what are you doing this for?", or "what a silly fool you're making of yourself," or "is it worthwhile—what you're doing?" or, "why are you doing this when you know it won't be appreciated?" These and a thousand similar questions may be asked by this little invisible man. In many cases this little man operates to our detriment. He may even induce a feeling of inferiority within us, a feeling which is hard to attribute to any concrete cause. The voice whispers within us. Perhaps in a way, this is the origin of the legendary German "Doppelgänger." That means literally "A double-goer." It is sort of what we would call a dual personality or a schizoid.

If this manifestation was felt only by people who are not in good health either physically or mentally, or people whom we can not rely upon for accurate statements, we could question the matter. But this is not so. Every one of us has felt the same thing to a greater or lesser degree. It is a common experience in which we all share. And the written records show such things in abundance. The real mystery is that the matter is not more commonly discussed.

HOW often have we heard of people hearing "voices?" A vast number of people have been hothoused with this weird phenomenon for ages. Such people have often felt themselves obsessed by a "devil." We may laugh at such things but that doesn't cancel the reality of the hypothetical voice to the person hearing it.

It has not always operated to the detriment of people of course. Consider great leaders who have felt it. Consider great artists and to a lesser extent, great scientists. All have been inspired at one time or another by these intuitive voices.

This is not something to which a measuring instrument can be applied, for it is much too subtle for that. There is no way of using a meter-stick on mystic facts. That is why so little material in the legitimate scientific world, is found of this nature.

There is one man today who is trying to put this mysterious activity of the human mind on a scientific basis. He is Dr. J. B. Rhine of Duke University. We all are familiar with his experiments in "extra-sensory-perception," often shortened to "E.S.P." It is not so well known a fact that he has also experimented to some extent with such unusual things as we have been discussing. In his way, the man is a fearless scientist. He feels that he is on the threshold of a new world of phenomena, new in the sense that these things have not been explored. Actually of course we know that these things are as old as the recorded histories of mankind.

With such cold and logical and calculating brains devoted to the mystery of why we are influenced by "little men in the mind" or "intuition" or "auto-suggestion," perhaps a whole new field of scientific endeavor will be opened. Many philosophers have said "Man knows everything—excepting himself!" Probably no truer observation was ever made. If people begin accrediting the men who are willing to venture into these little known fields of science—not mysticism—a whole new way of living and enjoying life will be opened to us.

* * *

WITCH HUNTERS

MANY years ago in the fifteenth century there came into being through necessity, a group of men whose profession was to seek out people suspected of being witches and proving their guilt. Mr. Sprenger, of Germany, had the distinction of being the most active man of his profession. He made up a form of trial, and also a course of examination by which his professors even in other countries could discover witches. Sprenger alone was responsible for 500 deaths each year. Within three months, 900 were killed in Wurzburg, 600 in Bamberg, and 500 in Geneva. A judge in Lorraine took pride in the fact that he had condemned 900. The Archbishop of Treves blamed the cold spring of 1586 to

witchcraft, and burned 118 women at one time.

Pricking was the most common mode of discovering whether a person was one of Satan's children. The suspects were stripped naked and pricked all over with sharp instruments. The "physicians" were always anxious to find a spot that was insensible to pain, for that was a certain proof of guilt. The victims would scream when the needles were driven into them and were treated so cruelly that death would have been welcome. As their bodies became numbed by pain and unconsciousness and they failed to react to certain pricking, they were immediately burned as witches.

A French professor in 1720 gives the following symptoms as being signs that a person is bewitched:

1. Vomiting needles, nails, and pieces of glass.
2. Continual burning pains in the region of the heart, and the inability to retain food, and the feeling that balls were rising and falling in the throat.
3. Suddenly becoming ill, and wasting away without any known cause.
4. Prescribed medicines having the opposite effect and making the disease more intense instead of curing. To such an extent were cases against suspected witches, that even an old sow and her litter of little pigs were found guilty and put to death.

James VI of Scotland was a notorious witchfinder. The cruel ways in which he tortured the beautiful Gellie Duncan and her friend, Dr. Fian, are to the discredit of James VI. After the examination of Dr. Fian by James was concluded, he could no longer be called a man. His legs, in his high boots, were crushed to a pulp; his finger nails had been drawn out by pincers, and needles had been thrust way through his eyes. Restoratives had been given to him time after time to make him suffer more pain. In Manningtree, Essex, in the year 1644, there came into prominence a master witchfinder named Mathew Hopkins. His method of proving guilt was that of "swimming" the suspect. The right thumb of the victim was tied to the left toe, and the left thumb was tied to the right toe, and then he was wrapped in a blanket and placed on the back in a pool. If the suspect floated, as was nearly always the case, he was guilty, and was burned alive; but if he sank, he was innocent. Either way was to lose. Mathew Hopkins traveled in style with his assistants. They were put up at the best inns at the expense of the villagers and charged 20s. per head for each "witch" that they convicted. Another one of Hopkins ingenious ways of detecting witches was to place a woman in a room crosstegged on a stool. She was then watched by his assistants for twenty-four hours. All during this time she was kept without food or drink. Hopkins' theory was that at some time during the twenty-four hours, one of her imps would come to suck her blood. The imp might be in the form of a fly or most any insect, and all the doors were left open. It was

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the duty of the assistants to kill all the insects that appeared, and if a fly should escape, it was her imp, and the woman was pronounced guilty and sentenced to burn at the stake. Fortunately, Hopkins' idea backfired and he was "swum" according to his own methods, and of course was either drowned or burned.

Witches were seldom hanged because it was thought that burning was much more effective, for the blood was prevented from being hereditary to progeny.

* * * * *

G'MOTO'S VENGEANCE

THE slave-traders of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries found their most fertile source of human supplies on the west coast of Africa. Mercilessly they raided the Gold Coast, Portuguese Mozambique, and all those western African lands that later became huge colonies of the major European powers.

As time went on, the natives became more and more wary and it was necessary for the slavers to use more devious and subtle methods to enmesh their prey. Often pretending to be innocent goods-traders, they would lure large numbers of natives into their trading compounds and after surrounding them, seize them, chain them and ship them to the Americas. Sometimes a variation of this technique would require a more effective spokesman and lure in the form of what we would call a "Quizling" native. This native would be highly paid to summon his "friends" to a position where they could be captured by the slavers.

Captain Jeremy Teecourser, an unflinching scoundrel and a vicious slaver of forty years standing, relates an incident which even in his highly practical eyes assumes mysterious proportions. On October 11, 1754, the good captain landed on the west coast of Africa, where he contacted almost immediately a renegade native from the G'Moto tribe, a group of brave and courageous natives, who would ordinarily never be caught by slavers. Using Gallo (the native's name) an assistant chief, and promising him great wealth, Teecourser was able to make a haul of "Black Ivory" of great size. He bagged a great number of the tribesmen. Having full confidence in Gallo who had been an assistant chief for many years, they were caught flat-footed—among them was the chief, G'Moto, an elderly but noble man of some seventy years. Teecourser took him with, primarily to keep the natives more or less pacified and to prevent them from giving him any more trouble than was necessary.

Teecourser took his load of slaves to Haiti after paying off Gallo and ordinarily the affair would have ended then. But a colleague, also hunting slaves, caught up a bunch of natives, among whom was the traitor, Gallo. Gallo could do nothing with this new man, of course, and he, too, was shipped as a slave. But more than coincidence

seems to have stepped in, for he was shipped to Haiti, too!

News travels fast among enslaved peoples. It was not long after Gallo was working in Haiti on a plantation, that his presence became known to G'Moto's tribe, most of whom had been sent to the opposite end of the island. The night of this discovery, in their miserable huts, the tribesmen held a voodoo meeting, certainly intent on destroying the cause of their misery. Plans were made to sneak one man away, a young powerful warrior whose duty was to cut Gallo's throat. But before he could run away, G'Moto stepped in.

HE HARANGUED his tribesmen long and loudly. He pointed out that the gods could be satisfied only by Gallo's death through their intervention. Therefore they must plead with the gods to destroy Gallo—not to do it themselves so directly. Respecting G'Moto, they acceded, and long into the night the weird prayers and chantings went on. The drums beat almost silently. On the other end of the island, Gallo knew what was going on—he felt it.

All through the night the invocations to the god went on, progressing from the mad voodoo dance to the sacrifice of the chicken. What a sight that must have been! In the dimly-lit, smoke-filled, reeking huts, fifty powerful lusty young warriors and maidens went into their frenzied dance to the muted beats of the drums, beats that crept in the mind not through the ears, but through the oiled black skin. At the height of the orgiastic festival, when the compound was literally filled with maddened heasts, G'Moto arose from the dias where he reigned, and with his powerful wiry fingers tore out the throat of the writhing chicken handed him by one of the dancers. The blood gushed out over G'Moto and bathed in his enemy's heart-blood, G'Moto symbolically enjoyed the death of Gallo.

What happened?

For a week, apparently nothing. Then one morning, an overseer, making the usual morning rounds, stumbled into one of the huts where his master's slaves were kept. He looked down at an inert object and then shuddered.

There lay Gallo, his sightless eyes grinning upward, his face a death-mask, and his throat a bloody mass of torn flesh and gristle, as if some gigantic mouth had torn it asunder! Gallo had met his fate!

There is no explanation. No native would ever admit doing it, and even if he had, it was almost a physical impossibility to do anything of the sort. Logicians can explain away such things very easily, but there are those, even today, who prefer to think that there was the intercession of some *foreign agent*. Captain Teecourser, shrewd old Yankee that he was, only related the story—he never offered any explanations, and when questioned on this he gave the answer that he often used in his diaries—"There are strange things . . ."

WHITE LADY OF DEATH

THE legendary "white lady" of the Hollenzollerns is said to have appeared before every crisis in the history of the family. During the fourteenth century the widow of a nobleman fell in love with a Hollenzollern prince who ruled over Brandenburg. The prince told her that he could never marry her because of "four eyes." Because she had two children, she thought that he was referring to them, so she pushed her eyes out thinking that she was removing the obstacle to their marriage. After she had done this, he still did not marry her, and she died soon after the tragedy. Since her death she has haunted the palaces of the Hollenzollerns, always appearing as an omen of death.

During the reign of Frederick the First, the Queen was giving a royal ball. Many of the crown heads of Europe were present. The queen was playing cards with some ambassadors and the young people were dancing, when suddenly the music stopped. The young princesses came running to her, pale and horrified. They said that they had looked out the window and had seen the Lady in White floating among the lilac bushes. A heavy silence settled over the gay ballroom scene, and all that could be heard was the sound of the king hammering in his carpentry shop. He was troubled with gout and the exercise kept him from being so stiff. The sweet scent of lilacs floated through the windows and sentries came from different wings and gates of the palace to report that they had seen the White Lady floating through the corridors and gardens.

After the queen recovered her composure, she ordered the music to start for the dancers, and she sat down again to play cards. Suddenly there were exclamations of wonder and delight, and the queen turned, and to her great surprise, saw the king coming down the corridor. His eyes reflected anger and his legs trembled even though he was supported by two valets. He came straight to the queen and grabbed her savagely by the arm. He uttered disgust at the sight of her wearing jewelry and enjoying earthly pleasures. He commanded all to follow him and refused to disclose his plan. No one dared to disobey, and the long procession of bejeweled ladies and gentlemen of his court followed the royal pair through endless corridors and staircases until they at last reached the White Salon which Frederick had built and decorated. The doors were flung open and the queen cried in horror as she saw two coffins. The king explained in his cruel sarcastic voice that he had made them himself that very night while she revelled with the others. His sadistic mind commanded her to climb into her coffin that he had just made for her, in order that he and all the others might see just how she would look. The queen faltered a moment as though she might dare to disobey, but then she asked her maids to help her. She lifted the hem of her royal robe and stepped over the edge of her coffin. She stood regally for a moment and then

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lay still and calm with her eyes closed in her new white coffin. The king looked at her with cruel lines marking his face. In a few minutes she opened her eyes and looked at him, and then climbed out of the coffin. She bowed to the king and told him it was now his turn. His courtiers helped him to lie down in his coffin and he remarked that he would soon be sleeping there. At that very moment, the grave silence was broken by cries and the sound of sentries running in the antechamber. It seems that they had seen the Lady in White go through the whole corridor and enter the room where they were congregated.

They were all numbed with fear and the king asked if the White Lady wore white gloves or black ones. When the Lady wears white gloves, it means a woman is to die, and if she wears black gloves it means the death of a man. One of the aids finally broke the silence by telling the king that she wore black gloves. He knew that her presence meant death for him and he asked to be helped from the coffin saying that he would be put back in it soon enough.

The next morning the king lay dying. The White Lady of death had won again.

THE CORNER STONE

IN MODERN times the ceremony of "laying the cornerstone" is regarded as having only sentimental value, and adding nothing to the stability of the building. Competent architects and skilled workmen insure permanence and strength of the structure, and if the man who lays the cornerstone drops dead during the ceremony, it will have no effect on the permanence of the building. Years ago the opposite was true. Laying the cornerstone with a solemn ceremony, sacrificing a human being, was much more important than the workmanship. Then the people believed that the soil was owned by the spirits and they resented having human beings deface their landscapes with their dwellings. These spirits were so powerful that if they were not continually appeased, they could destroy the human race. So the art of making the gods happy was the most important one of all for without their happiness all the other arts would be meaningless.

There is a Danish legend that has to do with a curse upon the walls of Copenhagen. Each time they built the walls up, they fell down again. Finally the people took a sweet little girl and sat her on the ground with her toys. While she was amusing herself, they built the walls around her. Without this sacrifice, all the skill in the world would have been of no help, but by the offering of this child, the gods were appeased, the curse was lifted, and the walls of the city were allowed to stand.

While the fort of Scutari was being built, a ghost appeared and demanded that a certain woman be buried alive in the foundation. The builders thought it would be impractical to go

on with their work and not heed the demand of one in the great beyond, so the sacrifice was carried out.

There is a German legend that two brothers lie entombed in the foundation of the Strassburg Cathedral. Also a story that the wife of a famous architect, who had drawn up the plans for a certain edifice, was cemented into the foundation at the command of an archangel from heaven.

These human sacrifices were hard on the tender-hearted people, so in years to come, the priests, who were representatives of the gods, contented themselves with the first fruits of the flocks or the field.

There is a Jewish legend that when the Jews were told to make bricks without adding straw, they were not able to make their quota in their allotted time. So the Pharaoh commanded them to brick up little children in the walls that should have been filled with bricks.

Fortunately a change was made from offering human beings. For instance a ram was slaughtered instead of Isaac, and a doe in place of Iphigenia. In some places in Africa, the shadow of the man is believed to contain his soul. So when a hut was to be built, it was the custom for someone to sneak up to an unsuspecting person and measure his shadow with a stick and then throw the stick into the ground that was to be covered by the hut. Of course, no African would want his shadow entombed if he could avoid it, for it would mean that his soul had been given to the foundation gods and he couldn't expect to live much longer. But this was much better than burying the man himself.

So from such pagan beginnings, our modern ceremony of laying the cornerstone has developed. Instead of sealing a man, woman, or animal in the cornerstone, we seal in some documents of historic interest, so that when the building becomes old and is torn down, archaeologists may find information of our civilization.

THE EXTINCT TRIBE OF THE ABIPONES

THE ABIPONES were a South American tribe which wandered over the Gran Chaco region. They became expert horsemen and were implacable foes of the Spaniards. They made their living by hunting, and were physically well built. For weapons they used the bow and arrow, lance and shield. The women of the tribe did the tattooing, and the men practiced couvade. Couvade was a primitive custom in which the man of the family took to his bed when a child was born, or cared for the child, or submitted himself to fasting and purification. Because of constant wars with the Spaniards and also due to their customs of killing all but two children born to a family, the tribe which once numbered 5000 is now extinct.

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THE GHOST OF NAPOLEON

★ By A. MORRIS ★

NAPOLÉON'S mother was living alone in an apartment in Rome during the spring of 1821. Although she was old, blind and nearly paralyzed, she never gave up in her efforts to help her son, Napoleon, who was exiled on the rock of St. Helena four thousand miles away. She managed to send him two priests, a servant and a cook, and a Corsican doctor. There was a great love between Napoleon and his mother. He had always said: "All that I am and was I owe to my mother; she taught me her own principles and encouraged me in the habit of work."

During his six years of exile his mother, Letizia, never gave up hope that some day he would return to France. It was a warm spring day in May, 1821, and Letizia sat dozing in her drawing room. Her porter was also napping in the hallway downstairs, when a harsh voice spoke to him commanding him to take him to 'La Signora Madre'. He said he had brought news of her son, the exiled Emperor at St. Helena. The porter delivered his message to Letizia, and she said to show him in at once. The stranger stepped into the room and did not drop his enormous cloak till the door had closed behind him. When he revealed himself, Letizia could see him clearly even though all else was blurred. Letizia was unable to speak, but her shaking hands caressed his cheek. She thought that he had managed to escape St. Helena and had come to her for shelter. He stepped back away from her and said in a solemn manner, "May the fifth, eighteen hundred and twenty-one—today!" His tone of voice paralyzed her senses and he stepped back and vanished from her sight. She hurried to the porter in the hallway and asked where the stranger had gone, but the porter said that he had not yet left her apartment.

On that very day on the rock of St. Helena in the Atlantic, the birds were not singing. Instead it was raining furiously. Napoleon lay dying on the narrow camp bed he had used in Austerlitz. There was the sickening odor of stables coming in through the cracks of his shabby bedroom, and rats ran about among his few little keepsakes—candlesticks from St. Cloud, a picture of Josephine, a gold watch of Rivoli, a silver clock from Frederick the Great. The light from a night-lamp cast an eerie veil over the Roman Emperor's face and brought back the ghost of the youth Letizia had loved.

It was three months before Letizia learned that Napoleon had died on May fifth, eighteen twenty-one.

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